

ISSN 2395-2032

**Journal  
of  
the Department  
of  
Sociology**



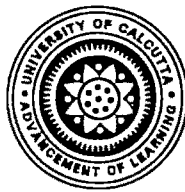
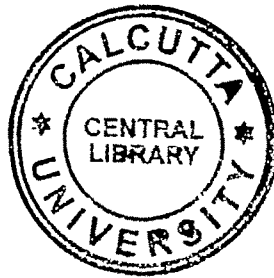
**University of Calcutta**

**2012 - 2014**

CUP- H 00582 - 3 - G 146427

Journal  
of  
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of  
Sociology

95/3



University of Calcutta

2012 - 2014

*Journal of the Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta*

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*Journal of the Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta*

***From the Editor***

We are happy that at long last we could bring out the current issue of *The Journal of the Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta* (initially conceived to be *The Annual Journal of the Department of Sociology, Calcutta University*). Originally planned to be a volume dedicated to the contributions of Louis Dumont (his centenary year fell in 2012), it took a lot of time to come to its present shape. The Department held a one-day seminar on Louis Dumont. And, the Department sought to compile the papers presented at the seminar in the form of a volume of the *Journal of the Department*. But save and except Professor Basabi Sur no presenter in the seminar submitted their articles for publication in the journal. The editor contacted different scholars from Kolkata and from outside Kolkata to contribute to the journal. But, as Dumont happens to be a controversial figure as well as a scholar difficult to deal with, people made promises but did not keep them. Hence, the inordinate delay in publication. The volume, however, contains two articles devoted to Dumont's contributions to Indian Sociology.

This volume contains one long article on Swami Vivekananda as well by a Professor of Sociology who is an alumnus of the department. And, we are happy to introduce from this volume of the journal space dedicated to presentations by our research scholars. As many as four research scholars from the department contributed to this volume.

The editor takes the opportunity to put on record the visit to the Department by Professor Tapan Raychaudhury, the eminent social historian from Oxford. He spoke on 'Vivekananda Revisited' in the seminar held on the occasion of the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the great patriot-prophet of India, and the great seer of the East.

The department was enriched by deliberations also by other scholars from abroad who visited the department during the immediately preceding period. First, one should mention the name of Professor Vandana Purkayastha from the University of Connecticut. She spoke on Human Rights with special reference to the women.

Then, Dr. Nicholas Kazanas, Director of the Omilos Meleton Cultural Institute of Athens, addressed the faculty and the pupils of the department. He spoke on the impact of new interpretation of ancient geography and

### *From the Editor*

culture of India on the modern Indians, which was made possible through advancement in science and technology.

And lastly, there was Professor Bradley Hertel who retired from Virginia Tech. He spoke on the social aspects of the Indian calendar in the changing cultural scenario engendered by the age of globalization.

The department pays homage to Professor Debkumar Bannerjee and Professor Bela Dutt Gupta, who first adorned the S. P. Mookherjee Chair of Sociology and Human Relations in the University of Calcutta. They were the teachers of the Editor and her colleagues in the Department of Sociology in the University of Calcutta. The department arranged a Memorial Lecture devoted to Professor Dutt Gupta in grateful remembrance of the contribution made by her to the growth of the Department. The lecture is, hopefully, going to be an annual phenomenon henceforth. The first Memorial Lecture was given by Professor D. N. Dhanagare, Research Professor at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla. He spoke on Social Movements with special emphasis on Mahila Aghadis in Maharashtra.

The idea of a commemorative lecture in the name of Professor D. K. Bannerjee was also broached.

The department gratefully acknowledges the support, both intellectual and material, from the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of the University for all the seminars and lectures arranged by it. It sincerely thanks also the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Academic Affairs for his active participation in the academic programmes of the department.

The department held a Book Discussion, the first of its kind in the Departments of Sociology in West Bengal. The book under discussion was *Sociology at the University of Lucknow The First Half Century (1921 – 1975)* by Professor T. N. Madan. And, the discussants were Professor Surendra Munshi, Retired Professor of Sociology at I.I.M, Kolkata, Professor Abhijit Mitra, Retired Professor of Sociology, Burdwan University, and Gayatri Bhattacharyya of the University of Calcutta. The onus of conducting the discussion fell on Smt. Bhattacharyya. The Book Discussion was sponsored by the Calcutta Office of Oxford University Press.

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The department has created a gallery of photographs of pioneers of Indian Sociology. And, finally, thanks to the kind permission from the Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, Professor Suranjan Das, and the release of necessary fund by the Hon'ble Pro-Vice-Chancellor (B.A. & F.), Professor Mamata Ray, the Conference Room of the department has recently been remodelled. The renovation will, henceforth, better facilitate organization of seminars and other academic discussions by the Department.

The Editor fondly desires that the contributors to the journal would in future follow a uniform style of presenting references in their articles, say, for example, the one suggested in Chicago Manual of style. It will help expedite the publication of future issues of the journal.

Let the journal be a useful forum for sociological discourse.

## A Reading of Louis Dumont on Caste and Hierarchy

*Basabi Sur\**

*Dumont's choice of the grand theory as an explanation of the hierarchy in Indian society unleashes an enormous scope for asking empirical questions about caste. From what Dumont concludes from his study, caste is, apart from a hierarchy of the pure and the impure, also a variation of status, analytically separable from a variation of power.*

*At the long last, how much does decision-making in different social situations involve a definite and self-conscious attitude to caste is a deserving question. This would mean, as following the path of Srinivas, a study of interaction between caste and other social institutions.*

The centenary<sup>1</sup> of Louis Dumont has brought a covetable opportunity to revisit the issues and contentions that Dumont had voiced regarding Indian society. Dumont did not conceal his intention to test the viability of 'equality' as defined in French history. Apparently he wanted to contrast a situation of hierarchy with an egalitarian situation. He hailed from the land of French Revolution and carried, in all probabilities, a special concern about the ideal of equality as upheld in the Declaration of the Rights of Man.<sup>2</sup> Hence the epistemological background of Dumont's work in the study of Indian society has an international exposure about it.

Yet Dumont's thought never reigned over the minds of major authors who were at the time engaged in building Indian sociology. At the most it inspired and excited them towards some issues and the ethnographic style of research on a South Indian sub-caste. Several authors such as M. N. Srinivas, André Béteille, Dipankar Gupta, Arun Bose, Partha Chatterjee, Veena Das and R. S. Khare<sup>3</sup> have commented on Dumont's work elaborately. All of these authors who have turned over and over the ideas formulated by Dumont are more prone to offer their own observations on the consumed issues, than to verify or ratify what Dumont had to say about caste and hierarchy. Conceptualisation of the hierarchical meaning of caste by Dumont has been prolific. On the one hand he has raised the awareness about existence of caste in non-Hindu communities too for example the Christians, the Muslims and others, and on the other he gave an indication

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of the internationalization of the concept of caste. The latter he did by way of mentioning the concept of 'racial caste' in USA.<sup>4</sup>

Dumont got some of his major ideas about Indian society from his ethnographic interaction with a sub-caste whom he characterized as somewhat similar to a tribe. The Pramalai Kallar residing about the Western Ghat ranges were portrayed in his accounts as a structured population stratified in terms of place of residence in the order of sub-caste. These sub-castes, in prominent cases, are essentially groups based on caste related legitimacy of birth. The two criteria viz. legitimacy vs. illegitimacy of birth by the standard of caste names and, secondly, that of residence do not follow one another just as such. Instead there was mutual influence between these closely integrated factors. They were active upon each other with a precipitating effect. One automatically would lead to another and vice versa.<sup>5</sup>

Dumont's portrayal of the lineage-structured hierarchy among the Pramalai Kallar offers an image of this part of the Indian society as essentially heartless. The entire conceptualization of the hierarchy is in terms of rejection of one human being by another. While this foreshadowed his ensuing thesis of purity and impurity in 'The Homo Hierarchicus', an ethnological approach could always look for relations that defied the structure. It could also try and define the homogeneity of Indians in day-to-day living in behavioral terms. Dumont's work fell short of such discovery of interpersonal behavior. This made his thesis of purity and impurity a straitjacket built out of concepts.

For an Indian lineage that has managed to survive such cleavages across generations, Dumont's theory would most certainly appear as an unreal apparition. Life in India, especially for the lowly-placed among the Hindus, certainly is tremendously unenviable. But this truth is easily evident from the account of caste oppression and caste politics that are widely available in media. An ethnographic account has the scope to offer some more regarding the nature of life and survival, which is missing in Dumont's work on the Pramalai Kallar. This could be attributed to his point of departure taken from the general acceptance of the egalitarian ideology back in his own country (which is evident from his brief overture on Rousseau).<sup>6</sup> Sociologists may always take their own points of departure. But the society that they are to study would defy the simplicity of ideas and overthrow any analysis that refuses to look at the other side of the point of view. Yet, paradoxically, Dumont still attracts attention among the students of sociology, who, with mirth, wade through his visions to reach back to the

## *A Reading of Louis Dumont on Caste and Hierarchy*

Indian reality which is rather a bit more complex and dynamic than Dumont would think.

### *Purity and Impurity*

Going by the legends in the history of Anthropology, binary opposition is a meaningful tool to be employed in understanding social reality. Radcliffe-Brown is the most well known exponent of this concept and later on it reached its pinnacle at the hand of Levi-Strauss. This concept has a rich and colourful career<sup>7</sup> until it melted away under the overweening influence of post-scientism in the late '80's.

By the time the world found itself out of the Cold War, all the intellectual traditions were already fully mature. Fully saturated with the principles of scientism, rationality and efficiency, the intellectuals at this juncture were absolutely bent upon more deep and dynamic insights, including a feel of the lone individual. The focus on individual is as old as the Neo-classical school of thought. Now was the time to take some glimpses of this lone man's soul. Hence there was no more merrymaking over the ultimate power of a macro-model such as binary opposition and researchers went forth to get by some technique that would yield the most telltale narrative about the inequality and other maladies of social life.

Yet if the concept of binary opposition is taken as a small tool, it can be placed as a frame on a live social situation and thereupon one can see some sets of relations that would otherwise escape notice. We are reminded of this technique in '*Homo Hierarchicus*' where Dumont's term for purity and pollution is 'purity and impurity'. Taken as a mere usage, binary opposition is just a feature of the common parlance such as good and evil, big and small etc. But taken as a frame, it certainly means a lot and it means a hierarchy as soon as the terms used in it are value laden, such as good and bad, important and negligible, high and low, up and down, etc. Hence the notions of sacred and profane, pure and impure, etc. do carry theoretical import in so far as they are meant to signify a hierarchy. As far as Dumont's use of the 'pure-impure' opposition is concerned, it thus signifies what was the core of the ideas of *HH*, i.e. an overarching hierarchy among the people concerned wherever they are and whichever religion they might adhere to as a group. Encompassing the Muslims as well as the Hindus, caste thus, for Dumont, is simply a concept that can be applied to stratify people and put them in an order and define a macro-level hierarchy in a given community.<sup>11</sup>

As Dumont describes the distinction and relation between the sublineages and also their hierarchical positions as expressed in terms of their territories (upagramam)<sup>7</sup>, he most definitely has in his thoughts the notion of relatively pure or impure status. This indicates not only a binary opposition in the tentative sense, but also a relation that involves both difference and prescribed form of liaison.<sup>8</sup> From here the structural principle leads toward hierarchy.

### ***Hierarchy and Segmentation***

The Kallar have the 'Pulukkar' category that suffer 'abasement', are out of intermarriage and polluted in status. This depressed status is due to 'irregular ancestry'. And the territorial habitat of this lineage is marked as inferior to the four Tevar, the eight provinces, the twenty-four 'secondary villages' and some other minor units. A reading of Dumont's description of the structure of the Pramalai Kallar people yields the impression of 'segmentation', a term he himself has used in reference to the study of Lineage<sup>9</sup>. Most evidently the structuralist paradigm has a definite importance for understanding Dumont's writing which is huge, elaborate and, most certainly, repetitive.

And yet the style is not polemical, nor is it 'anthropological' in the sense Veena Das and Patricia Uberoi have tried to show in their articles in Khare's edited volume (2006).<sup>10</sup> Instead Dumont's thesis on the nature of Indian society, which is veritably the content of *HH*, carries his conviction about the characteristics of the society of India. He was fully confident about the indispensability of the hierarchical conception of purity and impurity for explaining the nature of Indian society.

Can a Sociologist afford to cherish a conviction? Can this conviction be derived from an ethnography done on a subcaste that lives in a small part of the country? A strong conviction of an author always unnerves his readers because the latter find it a challenging job to discover the legitimacy of their labour over the lines till the last paragraph. However, conviction about the truth of an idea also makes reading enjoyable in a different way, since the readers find they are in strong and stable hands.

*Homo Hierarchicus* has proved a thoroughly comfortable reading over the decades it has been there. The reader is always sure about what the book proposes to narrate and at last establish. And that is the point of departure for any reader who wishes to take a leap into the real India, obviously by finding the strongest criticisms of Dumont's conviction and not by accepting his thesis because of his erudition.

### *A Reading of Louis Dumont on Caste and Hierarchy*

But we could simply think that Dumont's *HH* is a word-to-word search for a society that matches with the other societies in different instances and different contexts. The one and only conviction that surfaces throughout the book is that people are led by their beliefs rather than necessities in their action. Had they been led by their compulsions and needs, their behavior could well have been a subject of inquiry. But since they are assumed to be led by their beliefs and ingrained ideas in the main, their behavior is supposed to be unvarying, universal and independent of micro-level exigencies. A grandiose work such as *HH* thus has fulfilled its task of unleashing a question. Finding answers to the question is a different task and remains certainly to be accomplished by different batches of researchers in various contexts, unendingly and with reference to an unending variety of social and political situation. Understanding hierarchy in Indian society is always incomplete, and always needs to be completed. The search is infinite because it is an inductive exercise and the essential nature of this society, as of any human society, is change.

Dumont was roughly contemporary to M. N. Srinivas.<sup>11</sup> Hence there is reason to believe that the intellectual configuration of the scientific community of that time had it in itself that a researcher could just as well look for an ideology that is probably underlying the society in concern. The ideology of purity and impurity, or for that matter the overarching commitment to the concern about purity in Dumont's case seemed to serve, in all probability, as the methodology of a study of caste in India.<sup>12</sup> He was conscious about the contemporary commitment to empirical research that was led by no less persons than Srinivas and N. K. Bose. Nonetheless the Dumontian conviction that India is an essentially hierarchical society was based on the axiom that what man practices emanates from what man thinks and believes. Instead of wondering how he could propose such an axiom, we would rather leave this riddle to the guess that Dumont was in an urgency for a grand theory which he most interestingly thought legitimate. He left the empirical study of contemporary happenings in India to others and rushed for a heuristic idea which was less than a model and more than a proposition. That people in India think in terms of purity and impurity<sup>13</sup> is a sweeping comment following, in all probability, from ignorance about the epistemology which poor people are likely to follow in their day to day escapade from poverty. That common people are used to interpreting the immediate situations according to the immediate conveniences, is common knowledge to a permanently resident Indian but is scarcely comprehensible to a visiting researcher unless he takes all precautions against lapses.

Irrespective of the minute features of accumulation and analysis of data, the fifties, the sixties and the seventies were most definitely an era of intensive

fieldwork by sociologists in India. Continual references to contemporary developments in state and civil society and citations of past fieldwork appeared in publications along with serious and laborious comments on the reports from high-level sources.

While Dumont was a part of the empirical research, and built his *HH* largely as an extrapolation of what he considered his findings among the Pramalai Kallar, he advised contemporaries to study society in terms of what common people think and speak. It supposedly did not occur to Dumont that common people may not think and speak the same truth, knowing well that they would always live in different layers of economy and society and be involved in different facades of relationships that they sustain in life.

In his study of commensality in *HH*, Dumont writes, "Separation as a general principle is deeply embedded in our minds, and we must rid ourselves of the excessive emphasis on it..... In the last analysis, separation results from the organization of the whole. As we have already mentioned in passing, this is a particular case of a structural law : for a group placed in a whole, its relation to the whole takes precedence over or governs its assertion of its distinctness and its internal cohesion." <sup>14</sup>

So, after all the fieldwork done and discussed, Dumont reclined upon a holistic understanding of a society knowing quite well that holism would inescapably lead to an ideological position. What was the compulsion at the back of such a holistic bend? This question would always remain, be it for Dumont, or whoever else would declare holism as the vista towards truth, and that again right in the midst of the decades of M. N. Srinivas, S C Dube, André Bêteille and a few others. <sup>15</sup>

In his chapter on 'System and Structure' Dumont writes ".....I must make clear that I do not claim that the opposition between pure and impure is the 'foundation' of society except in the intellectual sense of the term : it is by implicit reference to this opposition that the society of castes appears consistent and rational to those who live in it. In my opinion the fact is central, nothing more." <sup>16</sup>

The readiest reaction on the part of common Indians to this observation about centrality of caste would in all probability be a citation of the use of Reservation for SC, ST and OBC in the nationwide endeavor to mitigate caste? Yet a debate certainly is involved here. The first question is, why should a society whose central fact is caste, try to mitigate caste? The second question is, what is the common people's perception of Reservation.

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The first question, without a doubt, draws a blank, while the second question deserves wide empirical research. If we apply our knowledge of Analytical Marxism in this research, the answer might lead us to discovery of a man who is offered Reservation in his favor and pauses and thinks how to make the best out of it. The Indian polity simply introduced Reservation as per the constitutional regulations. Implementation of Reservation depends upon the people and the success and failure of this Implementation at the social plane depends on the attitude of individuals, in a given context, in a given situation, towards the goal and means of Reservation. However the newly emerging elite within the SC (referred to as the creamy layer) is not the fruit of unusual selfishness of the abler ones among the SC communities. It is only the structural limitation to the national effort for egalitarianism and we can explain this with the aid of Bêteille's thesis on reproduction of inequality through family and social capital.<sup>17</sup>

When such poignant questions face the civil society, what can be the exact ways and means to define caste as a constant? Since the life and career of caste depends on the operation of the State and its interaction with its people, what should be the approach underlying the selection of indicators of caste? From what Dumont concludes from his research on the tensions between the Brahmin and the Kshatriya, caste is, in the last analysis, a variation of status, analytically separable from variation of power. But how to locate these variations in what happened yesterday and today and is likely to happen tomorrow, in public space, at macro level and at micro level, in different parts of the country? Would all these change once India achieves a GNP of 12% p.a., and ensures a well managed money-market with a well managed supply of labour? Who is a sociologist if not a student of her own life and experience as a part of her own people and her State and Government? And what would a sociologist propose to say if asked about the relation between individual and the State? She cannot stop at offering the most recent and most sophisticated theories. She is expected to offer some data that would enlighten her own mind. What are the most recent data about caste? Do they hover around the issue of the use of Reservation? If so, then caste most certainly is getting reshaped,<sup>18</sup> begging the question as to how to define it in the new situation and what should be its indicators.

'Marriage market'<sup>19</sup> and a few such issues are involved in any broad examination of the importance of caste. But the methodological position in such studies is of cardinal importance. We would suggest a 'behavioral approach' regarding the study of caste.<sup>20</sup> How much does decision-making in different social situations involve a definite and self-conscious attitude to caste is a question that deserves attention. If India would like to grow conscious about her social milieu and its political import, we cannot do

without some knowledge of how caste-names are put to use in civic and political discourse.

All these words come in the wake of re-reading an author who was so brave as to write his own words about caste, following his experience of the same in India and other places. A debate always holds a light and a light always hails a journey. Belief in holism never means to obstruct research in the field. Hence Louis Dumont is supposed to have left some tasks to the others, never meaning to usurp the entire initiative about the research he undertook. It is not inconceivable in the land of Gita and Mahabharata that caste and hierarchy do not only exist, but go on evolving every minute in various ways. Caste assumes different faces in response to happenings in economy, polity and poverty. Almost all researches done by M N Srinivas have described such interaction between caste and other institutions in society.

If Dumont has found it advisable to understand caste in terms of purity and impurity, we can try to find out what use an individual does put 'purity and impurity' to in ever-changing situations. Both pure and impure castes have their advantages and disadvantages, considering the politics of vote and rhetoric. It is always worthwhile to try to learn what use the pure and impure caste-names are put to by people in their respective battles of life. It is worthwhile to follow contemporary history minutely in the electoral politics of various States and regions within States. This would help us comprehend the evolution of the meaning of caste in modern life.

### ***Concluding Words***

So the gist of our views on Louis Dumont's work is as follows. The majestic structure of Dumont's work, his erudition and his laborious efforts in ethnology has left a permanent mark in Sociology in India. Along with his great work of starting an academic journal that has still a long way to go, he has sparked off debates that have claimed a few lakhs of words in the Indian sociological literature. But the present generation has the onus to build some sociology in India that would be thoroughly empirical, so as to plug the gaping loopholes that inevitably emerge as one proceeds to apply the Dumontian thoughts to the problems of Indian life.

### **Note**

Current data on the distribution of employment in governmental and university sectors between different 'communities' such as General caste, SC, ST, OBC etc. show that the SC, followed distantly by the ST are plodding ahead in these sectors,<sup>21</sup> which proves that Reservation quotas are telling upon India's social matrix, though whether this will put the curtain on caste in India, and especially among Hindus in India, is yet to be seen. There are many more avenues through which some people may try to proclaim that they are purer and the others are not so pure. Family name, inherited wealth, residential space, social network etc. are only a few of them.

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## Louis Dumont's Application of Comparative Method and N. K. Bose

Gayatri Bhattacharyya<sup>†</sup>

Louis Dumont, the author of *Homo Hierarchicus*, is both praised and adversely criticized for his efforts in the field of Indian Sociology. Indeed, he was one of the first who sought to delineate the field of *Indian Sociology* and suggest a certain method to be followed in the realm. He and his collaborator, David Pocock, felt it disturbing that "*We in India* were in danger of slipping off into the most hopeless condition of atomization in which each writer elaborated his own theories, politely ignored anything which anyone else has said and .... allowed to go by default the contribution which studies in India can make to the general discipline of social anthropology. (Dumont and Pocock, 1960:83; emphasis added). Both Dumont and Pocock were *not* Indians by birth or products of the Indian academic milieu but the two started the journal, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, and both of them did fieldwork in India and studied the Indian lore and published seminal works founded on the results of their study and fieldwork in India.

The area of interest of the two scholars at that stage was primarily the Indian society and culture and, probably, this fact prompted them to write "*we in India*" in the citation presented above. Both of them claimed to have adopted *ab initio* a comparative view. The article from which the statement quoted is reproduced contains in the very first paragraph a comparison between the situations in anthropological studies in and of Africa and those in and of India. But, their claim to the understanding of "Indian-ness" has come to be interrogated by scholars such as A. K. Saran 1962 and their (Dumont's in particular) exercise or effort in "comparative" sociology has attracted caustic remarks from sociologists like André Béteille (Béteille in Gupta (ed.) 2005; also cf. Khare (ed.) 2006).

And, their success in understanding Indian-ness is, according to both Saran and Béteille, contingent on the viability of the comparative method followed by them, which is suspect in the eyes of critics. It is, therefore, important to examine the nature of Dumont's (and, by implication, Pocock's) comparative method.

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It is very interesting to note that both Emile Durkheim and Max Weber used comparative method in their understanding of the nature of sociological realities across societies and cultures. Durkheim has used data from the Indian culture most remarkably in highlighting the nature of 'Brahma' in the Indian (Hindu) religious and philosophical heritage for buttressing his own thesis that religions do not necessarily get founded on the existence of the notion of deities, God or gods (Durkheim, 1995 : 31 passim). Of course, his dichotomy of the sacred and the profane is found faulty by several Indian scholars such as Veena Das and Baidyanath Saraswati. Weber's understanding of social stratification, based on his comparative study of the phenomenon of inequality in societies, has been found dependable by Indian scholars such as André Bételle and forms the bedrock of Bételle's famous treatise, *Caste, Class and Power* (1965). Of course, Weber's pronouncements on the other-worldly nature of Indian culture and society in course of his comparative study of religions has been interrogated by the Indian Scholars (Munshi, Surendra, 1988). The understanding and application of "comparative method" is, though widely practised, problematic.

Since Dumont, as a French scholar, inherits the properties of French scholarship in sociology, we may consider what Emile Durkheim says about the comparative method. Durkheim wrote a small piece, 'Civilisation en général et types de civilisation' in the famous journal, *Année Sociologique* (founded by him), 5, 1902 pp. 167-8. An English rendering of the same is furnished in 'Civilisation in general and Types of Civilisation (1902)' included in Durkheim, 1982 : 243-244. Durkheim deplored in that note the vagueness prevailing among the social scientists regarding the nature and content of civilization in general and the consequent fuzziness in comprehension of the character of general sociology. According to him, "While every special social science deals with a determinate species of social phenomena, the role of general sociology might be to reconstitute the unity of all that is dissected by analysis in this way" (Ibid.:243). Discernment of the 'civilisational' aspect of a society (or a cluster of societies) will help the process. From this point of view, advises Durkheim, one should particularly ask how a society (or a group of societies), which is a composite of relatively independent parts and differentiated organs, *can nevertheless form an individuality* endowed with a unity which is analogous to that of individual parts. Very possibly, one of the factors which most contribute to this result is what is termed "the civilisation appropriate to each social type and even, more especially, to each society. This is because there is in every civilisation a kind of tonality *sui generis* which is to be found in all the details of collective life" (Idem). An important task of sociology is to determine the different types of civilisation. The *characters*

of peoples is another factor of the same kind. "In a society as in an individual, the character is the central and permanent nucleus which joins together the various moments of existence and which gives succession and continuity to life" (Ibid. 244). The types of civilization and types of collective characters are, in Durkheim's understanding, closely interlinked. In this understanding, the world of symbolic forms plays a prominent role.

In keeping with the sociology of symbolic forms outlined by Durkheim and Marcel Mauss and the logic of the structuralist project outlined by Claudé Levi -Strauss, Dumont made Hinduism with its emphasis on hierarchy into a pan-Indian, encompassing value-system, that he called 'ideology'. He considered that this value system was sensible enough and could be isolated from the other aspects of the social world. He then opposed ideology thus understood to its 'empirical residual component', to facts of a socio-economic nature. This principal differentiation led to the second distinction, which Dumont made, between the caste system, on the one hand as a value system (or ideology) that is expressed by the indigenous learned model of the four *varna* (social orders) and, on the other hand, the caste system as an empirical system of *jati* (caste as such), observed within a given territory. There are, Dumont wrote, in a piece published after the appearance of the first English edition of *Homo Hierarchicus* [in 1970], "two indigenous models, one of which is very old, [the *varna* model], but is still present in the culture, quite apart from my interpretation..... I propose to recognize it as underlying or completing the *jati* ideology" [which constitutes the other or second model]" (Dumont, 1971 : 73). If the *varna* model completed the *jati* model observed in the field, what cognitive status does the sociologist allow to the learned model? Dumont's position was ambiguous (Lardionis, 2013 : 352).

In order to reconcile the Brahmanical theory of *varna* with the rules of sociological method or the *varna* model and the *jati* model (observed in the field) Dumont came to focus on the distinction, which he thought to be a veritable one, between hierarchy and power, and their interaction and mixture. In this interaction he privileged hierarchy, "purely a matter of religious values" (1988:66), over power, which was limited, in Dumont's schema, "exclusively [to] political power" (ibid.:153) when power is understood to be legitimate force. Hierarchy is, in the Hindu scheme of values which condition the actual way of life, superior to power. And, this distinction is, in turn, based on the opposition of the pure and the impure. Purity is the foundation of status which stands above power in the hierarchical system of the members of (*varna*-and *jati*-governed) caste society of India. Ritual, religious values encompass the values of politics and power, which are not fully autonomous. It is clearly reflected in the

social world where the dominant non-Brahman castes stand in a lower position than the Brahmans despite their control or power over territory and other material resources. Ritually, the former are inferior to the Brahmans who are ritually purer than and superior to them. And, Dumont points out, "superiority and superior purity are identical; it is in this sense that, ideologically, distinction of purity is the foundation of status" (Ibid.:56). On the basis of observations by Hocart and Dumézil, Dumont points out that "the possibility of replacing a linear hierarchical order by a system of oppositions, which in fact, underlies it, applies not only to the varna scheme, but to the modern system of castes (jati) as well; in this the two systems are homologous, and it explains how it is that people pass so easily from the latter to the former. As to the principle of oppositions, if *it is religious in both cases*, there is however a difference. *In the matter of caste, the opposition is essentially between purity and impurity, and it is susceptible of indefinite segmentation* (Dumont, 1962; 49; emphasis added). Dumont makes hierarchy the chief differentium between the traditional society of India and the modern societies in the rest of the world, particularly the west. He observes, "the very word hierarchy, and its history, should recall that the gradation of status is rooted in religion : the first rank normally goes, not to power, but to religion, simply because *religion, represents for those societies, what Hegel has called the universal, i.e., the absolute truth*; in other words, because hierarchy integrates the society in relation to its ultimate values" (Dumont, Ibid : 54). Contrastingly, in an egalitarian society like the native society of Dumont, people tend to conceive of hierarchy as a scale of commanding power – as in an army – rather than as a gradation of statuses.

The foregoing account seems neat in its presentation, of course, not without problems. Does the contradiction of "traditional" (India) and "modern" (west) seem to be logically sustained when Dumont finds "the *modern* system of castes (*jati*)" homologous to the *varna* scheme which reflects the ideology of a hierarchy-based, traditional society such as Hindu India (Ibid.:49; emphasis on 'modern' added)? What does 'modern' feature of the caste system mean? Is it of the same nature as what is suggested by the 'modern' characteristic of "egalitarian" French Society or Western Society in general? Is the mark of hierarchy in the Indian (Hindu) socio-cultural system so stubbornly persistent as no amount of change brought about by transformation in socio-cultural and economic forces and circumstances can disturb or alter it? Does the Indian society, appearing in the mode of comparison adopted by Dumont not result in a vision of ahistorical, timeless changeless society in India? Does it not suggest a denial of history in an otherwise serious attempt at understanding the society and culture of India? The readers may not be further detained here.

Dumont's project of highlighting the uniqueness of the hierarchical nature of Indian (Brahmanical) society compares the Indian society not only with the "egalitarian" and modern societies of the west or of the westernized world but also with other societies inheriting an ancient tradition. The exceptional place of Indian society is, however borne out "in a comparison bearing on kingship" (Ibid. : 54). In most of the societies where kingship is noticed, it is a magico-religious as well as a political function. In the Indian case, the king depends on the Brahman priests for the religious function, he puts "in front of himself a priest, the *purohita*, and then he loses the hierarchical preeminence in favour of the priests, retaining for himself power only" (Ibid.:54-55). In the matter of principle, the Brahmins as such have never claimed political power. Indeed, neither the Brahman nor the king has arrogated to himself anything belonging to the other.

Myths and legends of the ancient Indian lore drive home the point made above. *Parasurama*, the Brahman, is said to have exterminated the *Kshatriyas*. It is, however, very clear in the relevant story that "Parasurama does not try to substitute himself for the Kshatriyas and to rule in their place". *Nahusha* even after securing the most exalted divine status, that of Indra, was turned into a python by the curse of Brahman sages who were forced by him to carry his palanquin on his way to the palace of Indra's consort, Sachi, and were insulted by him. *Vena's* pretension to arrogate to himself the religious privileges of the Brahmins and to identify himself, in their stead, with the sacrifice, sacrificer and the gods led to his death by the sages who produced from his body, first, his wicked genius, and then Prthu, the first consecrated king and the model of a king. In the well known story of *Visvamisra*, Visvamisra, the Kshatriya, was made to appreciate that brute force is powerless against the magico-religious force which defends the right of the Brahman, *Vasishtha*. The logic is vindicated in the story where Vasishtha's attempt to arrogate to himself the power of the king, Satyavrata, was frustrated by the visitation in the form of draught for the kingdom he ruled. The drought came to an end only when the king, i.e., *Satyavrata*, was restored by *Visvamisra* to his regal office.

The fundamental characteristic of the caste system of (Hindu) India is, according to Dumont, the hierarchical disjunction between status and power. Proceeding through the labyrinth of Dumontian argument and analysis one is made to accept the contradistinction between societies privileging hierarchy such as the Indian society and those which according to Dumont, stress equality and are found in western societies. The first type of societies is designated by Dumont as societies of HOMO MAJOR where man is considered a collective being. The second type of societies may be

said to be constituted by HOMO MINOR, which regards man as an individual man (Dumont, 1970 : 232-233).

The picture above is to a certain extent modified by the presence of the individual – outside – the – world and his millenarian action as recognized by the society in India. (Dumont 1965 : 85 – 99). It “was truly decisive for the permeability of Indian society to individualistic way of thought” (Dumont, 1970 and 1988 : 235). Dumont focuses in the foregoing manner on the differences between ‘hierarchy-based’ and holistic system of India with the ‘equalitarian’ and ‘individualistic society in the modern west and the probable capacity of the Indian society for effectively responding to the demands by the modern west for change, without however, succumbing to the hegemony of the latter.

It has already been mentioned that Dumont’s appreciation of the hierarchical nature of India has been subjected to excoriation by many scholars, Indian as well as non-Indian. André Béteille writes, for example, “I know only too well how generations of Western sympathizers of India have used their admiration for Indian tradition to mask their allergy to the India of their experience” (Béteille, 2005 : 358). Contemporary India is hardly amenable to Dumont’s method of study. That method places not merely values but values in their hierarchical order – that is value – at its heart and centre. The basic contrast by Dumont of Indian ideology with modern ideology animates the whole corpus of Dumont on India and also on the west. At the same time, Dumont has to recognize that India also exists in the contemporary world and partakes of modernity. Hierarchy and holism do not obtain in their complete and pure forms in the Indian society today, and some room had to be made in Dumont’s analysis for the basic modern values that are “compelling for everyone in the present world”. What exactly is the hierarchical arrangement of all this in contemporary India? Is such a hierarchical arrangement possible? Modern India lacks in that coherence and unity which is imagined by Dumont.

Dumont’s emphasis on Indology, of course, as it is understood by him seems to many to make his work vulnerable to the charge of neglect of the effect of change caused through India’s interaction with the contemporary world at large. Yet the confluence between sociology and Indology which is stressed by Dumont for a viable Indian sociology was not entirely novel. What characterized the discipline(s) of sociology (and anthropology) in India, at its beginning in the 1920s and 1930s, for example, in the work of G. S. Ghurye or Nirmal Kumar Bose, was the search for Indian-ness, in a mix of empirical data and textual elements drawn mainly from Sanskrit literature which was part of the milieu that nurtured these scholars.

Lardinois is, therefore, not surprised to learn that N. K. Bose was sympathetic to the views expressed in *Homo Hierarchicus*, "as he shared an homologous (through more flexible) viewpoint on the caste system with Dumont" (Lardinois, 2005:464). Dumont himself felt elated that J. H. Hutton and Nirmal Kumar Bose, two veteran scholars, more open-minded than their more modern, but often less experienced successors, sent words of their support and praise for Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* "*H. H.* can take pride on these two endorsements", writes Dumont (Dumont, 1988 : preface, particularly, xii-xiii). Bose reviewed *H. H.* in an article in a Calcutta newspaper; it was the issue of 13 June 1971 of the *Hindustan Standard* (Dumont erroneously mentioned 1974. The journal has ceased to exist).

Any reader of Bose's "The Hindu Method of Tribal Absorption" should appreciate the difference between him and Dumont in terms of variation in their emphases on interests – economic and political – and values in comprehending the nature of Indian caste system or socio-cultural system of India. Bose gave, it appears at first sight, relatively great importance to the role of economic interdependence in ensuring economic security of the segments contained in it and the overall stability of the system. Dumont emphasized more the role of the value of "Hierarchy" in the system. Bose did not, of course, neglect the role of value altogether (cf. Bose, 1960 : vi) in differentiating the social system based on caste from the system founded mainly on classes generated by inequalities in the distribution of wealth and power as is found, according to him, in the history of western societies. Bose referred to the value of liberalness of the caste system in recognizing the cultural identities and autonomy of the groups embraced by the caste system in preserving their cultural distinctiveness and also to its in-built safety-valve, the institution of *Sannyasa*, which provided the rebellious spirits with a way for moving out of the system.

Bose did not criticize Dumont's comparative and 'civilizational' approach. Civilizational approach suggests that there is a set of cultures and societies which contain common elements establishing their identity as members of a cluster which is somewhat distinct from another cluster of cultures and societies. The latter is compared with the former in order to understand the difference between the two clusters or civilizations and also their similarities. This approach thus postulates differences as well as similarities between civilizations which together give shape to the human civilizations.

Bose himself adopted a kind of civilizational approach in analysing the Indian (Hindu) system based on caste in order to highlight the specificity of the system through its comparison with the system obtaining in western



societies (Bose, 1976). Bose's civilizational approach is not, of course immune to criticism (see Bhattacharyya, 2013). What is, however, to be noticed immediately in the present discussion is Bose's defence of Dumontian approach in comparing societies and cultures. Despite his occasional acceptance of civilization as a homonym for culture and vice versa, he has in his mature years come to consider civilization as a constellation of cultures. The Indian civilization is a very good example. He takes pride on the recognition of plurality of cultures by the people of India. At the same time, his consideration of the overall picture of India suggests that Indian culture is one. "My own contention has always been that in certain respects Indian culture was one, in the same manner as the European culture can be distinguished from, say, Chinese culture. But within Europe there is certainly a large amount of cultural difference between the German and the French and the Anglo-Saxon. And even the Norwegian countries share in a slightly different strand of culture. And all of them we know are Christians. But their Christianity has not succeeded in completely liquidating all the local differences which are there. There is nothing to be ashamed of any local cultural traits. The point is if they come in conflict with one another or if they come in conflict with unified action at the political and economic level then it is a sign of danger. Any amount of cultural proliferation can go on but it must not hamper the collective life of the people" (Bose. 1970 : 3-4).

The preceding statement shows how the concern of an *Indian* anthropologist with the political and economic unity of his native country comes to influence and determine his scientific pursuit, his efforts towards understanding and clarifying the scientific concepts and the phenomena indicated and covered by them and applying them in the analysis of what is happening in his society and culture. Indeed, Bose apprehends that if there is no settlement at the economic and political levels of the issue and problem of sharing power in a democratic and amicable manner, it will breed endless differences and conflicts among the individuals and groups which will lead to disintegration of the Indian civilization. "Indian civilization will vapourise into a thousand different *sub-civilizations* which will appear as bubbles only for historical purposes" (Ibid. 5; emphasis added). Identifying the element of specificity of a civilization and its capacity for holding together the units embraced by it has had for an Indian anthropologist such as Bose both an academic (scientific) and a practical implication. The value-load of patriotism and nationalism is patent in Bose's conception and analysis of civilization, and the Indian civilization in particular. In Dumont's case, value load of a different nature is evident in his contrasting hierarchy and holism of the Indian society with equality and individualism which are, according to him, the hallmark of western society.

Value load of this type seems to focus on the specificities of two civilizations which are compared to the extent of, one feels concerned, even essentializing the particularity or especiality of each civilization taken up for consideration.

Bose has been a seeker of the element of unity in the Indian civilization which contains within itself many diverse elements at the local or regional levels. Diversity is an undeniable fact in the Indian society and culture. The problem is : how to explain their co-existence? Is the relation between diverse manifestations of interest groups and cultures one of juxtaposition only? If so, what happens if conflicts between them break out? How is antagonism bred by conflictual interests of groups and cultures to be overcome? The problem is sought to be resolved by throwing light on the unity of India at the civilizational level, i.e., by considering India, rather Hindu India, as a civilization.

If it is admitted that certain core-ideas lie at the base of each civilization and one looks for them by means of empirical research, why should anybody suspect or allege that there is something substantially wrong in such exercises? "Scholars like Leach and Dumont have tried to identify a constellation of core-ideas underlying caste but have in consequence been accused of trying to over-simplify a complex case. Such an accusation is unjustified.." writes Bose (1976 : 129). If one tries to locate a number of core-ideas which seem to "underlie a range of cultures" which apparently lie within the broad spectrum of a civilization, one does not, thereby and therefore, claim to describe the totality in the case of each of these cultures. "One is attempting to locate the central ideas which give a particular range of cultures distinctiveness from another range" (Idem). Bose takes the help from natural science to clarify his statement on the problem of common characteristics and specific features of social and cultural phenomena. A flying aeroplane or kite, an apple falling down on the ground are different phenomena. But, for a student of science all of them are governed by the element of G or gravity. It would be wrong to assume or suggest that to look for anything common called G in these different phenomena would be a futile or idle exercise. For G exists and is operative behind all the different phenomena mentioned above. "However, G is not the whole of the three phenomena or the only important factor in their existence and operation and the ancillary factors are as important in an understanding of the end results as the pull of gravity" (Ibid. 131).

Similarly, Bose points out, if somebody tries to study caste as it actually appears in different parts of India, among the high and the low, in the regulation of marriage or choice of occupations, or in political behaviour,

he can hardly be accused of disregarding differences. He may, rather, be viewed as one trying to locate, if possible, the core-elements of caste, and see how they have operated under a diversity of historical situations. The seekers of core-elements are, of course, liable to be criticized on the score that to locate such invariable (ascriptional) components of the caste system may yield a static picture. But, "Cannot the core-elements, enshrined in a civilization at a particular point of time, also go on changing?" asks Bose. And, he immediately comes with an answer that the core-ideas and attitudes underlying caste can be demonstrated to have changed from the late Vedic and early Buddhist period to the middle ages though not in a fundamental manner. The values, ideas and attitudes associated with the caste system experienced noticeable change only when its economic substructure was somewhat shaken by the commercial and administrative system of the British rulers who came to govern India.

One comes to observe a certain difference between Bose's understanding of the basic value of the Indian (Hindu) socio-cultural system as evidenced in caste and Dumont's understanding of the same. Dumont's comparative method appears to be spatial, the Indian and the western, but does not seem to attach adequate importance to the diachronic or temporal aspect while Bose does not lose sight of the time-dimension. Hence, for Dumont "hierarchy" comes to attach permanently to the Indians, *Homo Hierarchius*. But Bose finds no difficulty in raising the question: "why should core-ideas be supposed to remain unaltered even when a community is passing through varied historical experiences?" (Ibid. 131). If they change, as they actually do, the anthropologist cannot but have recourse to the historical approach in order to understand and explain how they have changed and what have been the resulting symptoms in the reshaping of the civilization's, in the present context, caste-based civilization's, constituent elements or cultures.

The ideational and historical relationships of a group of cultures originating a civilization undergo change through time and because of operation of a variety of forces and this change is reflected in the character of the emergent civilization. It is not, therefore, Bose observes, the discovery of core-elements which should form the only or even principal task of an anthropologist. His task is more onerous and complicated. He will try, on the one hand, to discover if there are some persistent core elements in the gamut of cultures encompassed by a civilization and, on the other hand, to comprehend their alternatives and specific manifestations in different situations. After having located the core-elements of a civilization, shared by its constituent elements, the social scientist will try to describe how these elements have actually been in operation under different, but historically specific circumstances, and thus gives rise "to the broad spectrum within

which one culture is distinguished from another, even when they lie within the compass of a common civilization" (Ibid. 133). Thus, Bose suggests ingeniously enough that social scientists studying societies such as India should try to discover diversities in unity instead of only finding out unity in diversity.

Dumont pursues and accentuates his idea of the unity of the Indian (Hindu) people resulting from their adherence to the 'value' of hierarchy as evinced in the caste system. He has not, it seems, attached required importance to the differences of the 'peoples' (not one single people) of India. Dumont has not, in short, been sufficiently comparative in this sense though he denies the charge.

Dumont's method of comparison bears the imprint of his penchant for comparing *traditional* India with *modern* west. And, as a result, he has not, it appears, succeeded in focusing on the protean aspect of caste and Indian tradition breeding variations, which is suggested in Bose's analysis as is outlined above.

To press their point Dumont and Pocock (1960 : 82 – 89) come heavily on B. K. Sarkar's *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*. Benoy Kumar Sarkar has by this time come to be considered a pioneer in Indian sociology though the way in which he has treated the phenomenon of Indian-ness is not satisfactory to all in an equal measure (cf. Bhattacharyya, 1990). It is important to point out here that Dumont did not speak against Sarkar for his utterance of "Hindu Sociology" (as Lardinois, 2012, seems to suggest) but for his alleged failure to see the differences between the caste system and the class system. Sarkar's error lies in his proclivity for discovering the commonness or similarities between societies or socio-cultural systems which oftener than not tends to miss the specificities of the units that are compared. They make a very significant statement in the following observation : "A comparison based on Indian material but which leaves out all that is distinctively Indian, that is concerned with similarities only and not, for some reason, with differences, is a comparison hopping on one leg" (Ibid. : 86).

Dumont and Pocock aver that the society which is revealed in and through caste and Hinduism constitutes a type and is fitly compared with other types. They themselves find "traditional Indian society sufficiently 'one' for" them to think it "reasonable to *make comparisons within it and then to make comparisons with the outside*" (Ibid. : 88; emphasis added). It is a point to be taken seriously by the researchers in anthropology and sociology in and of India, particularly by those who show interest in its comparison

with other kinds of society. The two scholars remind their audience of that comparative exercise may be of two types. In one kind of comparison the "conscious aspects of social life are epiphenomena", which once put aside reveal that men are all the same or that the same processes are found in all societies. In the other, which is advocated by Dumont and Pocock, consciousness is an essential part of social life, although by no means the whole of it. While there is a lot of food for thought in this attempt at highlighting the appropriate mode of comparing types of socio-cultural systems, a question seems still nagging : what is the role of element of time in the kind of comparative exercises attempted by Dumont? What is there in these attempts about temporality of "traditional Indian society" or *sanatana* Hindu *samaj* and the *varna-jati* system? Is this *samaj* impervious to the forces of change occurring through time?

There is, nonetheless, a measure of similarity between the ideas of Dumont (and Pocock) and the ideas of N. K. Bose on varna / caste. Both give relatively great importance to values than to matters of political and economic interests. Though, it is a fact that Bose attached great importance to that the caste system brought a sense of sharing in a common socio-economic enterprise among all the segments constituting the system. It gave "economic security [to its constituent parts] in spite of obvious inequalities; and this security was guaranteed by the law and custom" (1967 : 221). The advantages of "complementary non-competitive hereditary guilds, but modified by a feeling of racial superiority, which created the caste system in India, and *whose absence in other parts of the world prevented its growth* even when most of the other conditions for its formation were present in one form or another" (Idem; emphasis added). Bose like Dumont, it is patent, points out the uniqueness of the Indian caste system.

Despite his mention of the non-competitive nature of the production system sustaining caste in the past and his reliance on change in the occupational structure and economic arrangement of society as a factor explaining changes in the caste system, Bose did not neglect at all the value factor in originating and sustaining the caste system. Bose, like Dumont, stressed the relative importance of status in the institution of caste over and above the considerations of wealth and power. In Hindu society, the highest place is accorded to the Brahmin varna and not to the ruling or the trading segments of the society. "Premium is thus placed upon learning and character and not on wealth or warlike abilities" (Ibid. 220). Even with regard to artisan castes, "a higher place is assigned to those who conform more closely to Brahminical ideas about *ceremonial purity* than to those who have retained customs foreign to Brahminical practice" (Idem, emphasis added). The resultant process of elevation of lower castes into higher state (or what is

called Sanskritization) diminished, of course, the rigidity of the line of separation between the upper and the lower classes in society.

Bose did not show in his writings the degree of sophistication in distinguishing caste from other forms of social and economic inequality, e.g., class. But, he was insistent on that the caste system as a whole displayed the unique feature of accommodating the values of a plethora of human groupings cherishing a variety of cultures. In this sense the caste system was homologous with the "*federation of cultures* popularly known as Hinduism" (Ibid. 222 – 223, emphasis added).

Dumont contrasted the East with the West through the device of highlighting the uniqueness of the Indian caste system. N. K. Bose too does it, of course, in a slightly different way. He would compare the overall attitude of the regime in erstwhile Soviet Russia with the attitude of the protagonists of the caste – system. "The Russians do not *respect* the cultures of others as Indians do; for the latter hold that all cultures are true if they are in conformity with mental condition of the subjects in question" (Ibid. 223; emphasis in original). In other words, the Indians, it seems to Bose, are not strong believers in homogenization of the values and ideals of individuals and collectivities as their counterparts in the west are.

Bose compares the system nurtured in the Soviet Union with the one sustained by the caste system, and notes that both of them appear to have denied freedom to the individual in economic matters. Yet both have displayed a greater tolerance in respect of various types of human civilization. Their difference, however, lies in that Soviet Russia believed in and strove for a situation where science and its experience would "ultimately iron out the differences; while in India the belief has been uniformly held that a federation of human cultures should be our supreme goal; for, at no point of time, shall the individuals tally completely with one another". This view leads Bose to consider the position of individual and individual freedom in the caste system which appears to many as a totalitarian system. One should pause here a little before taking up the issue.

Bose does not give any explanation of how untouchability which was to him an abomination originated and continued in and through the caste system. Was the economic security supposed to be provided by the caste system so overwhelmingly attractive as those who suffered untouchability through the ages did not or could not do anything to put an end to it?

N. K. Bose adorned the high office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes of India and he meticulously gathered and

presented information of atrocities perpetrated by the higher castes on the (ex) untouchables in India. It is a bit surprising that his experience as the Commissioner did not result in any alteration in the neatness of picture drawn by him relating to mutual toleration of one another by the castes embraced by the caste system.

One gets the same impression when one reads Dumont about the caste system though Dumont did not adequately emphasize the value of mutual toleration of the different segments of the caste system because of their economic or occupational inter-dependence. The fact of extremity of harshness in interhuman relations and the consequent deprivation suffered by the untouchables in the material field seems antithetical to the putative acceptance of the *value* of hierarchy by all (!) the different segments of the *Homo Hierarchicus*.

With the aforesaid caveat in mind, the readers may examine the views of Dumont and Bose in two further areas, viz., caste and the Muslims and the relationship of the near – totalitarian system of caste with the existence of sannyasins or renouncers in the Indian society.

Both Dumont and Bose examined the question of acceptance of the institution of caste by the Muslims who constitute the largest and a very powerful minority community in India. Dumont took upon himself the onus of pointing out the mistake contained in the thesis that the communal divide among the Hindus and Muslims in India particularly in colonial and post colonial period was largely the making of the British. Bose, as a nationalist and freedom-fighter, had to consider the nature of the relationship of the two largest communities in India which might prove to be a factor in promoting or hindering the unified struggle by the Indians for freedom from the colonial yoke. It is important here to recall the allegation by B. R. Ambedkar against M. K. Gandhi. Ambedkar charged Gandhi that he did not see to and promote the legitimate demand of the Depressed Classes or the so-called untouchables to have a separate electorate to protect their interests in the proposed new dispensation to be considered by the British. But, Gandhi accepted the similar demand (i.e., separate electorate) when it was advanced by the Indian Muslims. True, Gandhi tried his utmost to keep up the Hindu-Muslim unity against the misrule of the British. But, it is equally true that Gandhi ultimately conceded to the demand of the Muslims for a separate electorate but resisted the similar demand by the lowest castes of the Hindu society and resorted to fast unto death. After the Poona Pact the lowest, untouchable castes (today's Dalits) did not have any separate electorate granted to them by the British (and eventually a separate state for themselves after the British had left India). It is not clear whether Gandhiji

admitted that the *Muslims had a separate civilization* from that of the Hindus. But, it is evident that he considered the lowest castes an inseparable part of the Hindu society and civilization. Gandhi, a votary of Hindu-Muslim amity, suffered, it appears, from an ambivalent attitude towards the Islamic civilization in India.

N. K. Bose, an admirer of Gandhi seems to have shared Gandhi's ambivalence noted above. He had, of course, maintained a clearly secular outlook and tried hard for Hindu-Muslim amity and unity. He seeks to explain the long-continued co-existence in India of the Hindus and Muslims who came at a stage in history to conquer India with a predominantly Hindu population and rule the country in terms of a certain 'federation of cultures' displayed in social institutions such as caste. Bose observed, "In India, the culture of the conquerors became, more or less, fused with the culture of the conquered, for it was all a slow and long-drawn process. And, thus came into being that federation of cultures popularly known as Hinduism. According to Hindu belief, it is held that each culture is suited to the particular people who profess it. All that is necessary in regard to any set of beliefs is that the impediments in the way should be cleared, so that the *individual* may rise to his fullest stature by outgrowing the demand of present emergencies (Bose, 1967 : 222- 223 emphasis added). The Russians (of Soviet Russia) allowed the Mohammedans to live according to their own faith, but they were also taught that science was better than Mahammedanism and would in the long run outgrow their religious error. But, India, as interpreted by Gandhi, teaches that "There are as many religions as there are individuals".

However, the foregoing 'picturesque' presentation of accommodative Indian (Hindu) culture seems almost obliterated by the hard reality. "When a Hindu becomes a Mohammedan in India he discards his old name and takes on an Arabic one. He eats his food differently, dresses in a new manner, and, on the whole, tries to leave his past entirely behind" (Ibid. : 222).

Still, the Muslims could not remain immune from caste-like divisions in their social organization. Bose cites in his *Hindu Samajer Garhan* (Andre Betteille's English Translation, *The Structure of Hindu Society*, 1975) excerpts from books by Muslim authors of Bengal or their reviews in Muslim Journals such as *Saogat* to illustrate this point. In its review of *Muslimaner Jatibhed* (Caste among the Muslims) by Mohammad Ali Yakub, the paper *Saogat* wrote : "Islam is the religion of equality .... Islam certainly does not support the erection of caste barriers in human society..... But Muslim society in India is a case apart. Here the influence



of their Hindu neighbours is strong; as a result, in imitation of the Hindus, the distinctions of caste have entered Muslim society also.....though the most hideous Hindu extremes of pollution by touch may not have found place in Muslim society..." (Bose, 1975 : 160).

Bose, a crusader against the discrimination continued through the caste system welcomed the anti-caste spirit reflected in the citation above. But, he overlooked how the enlightened Muslims who displayed anti-caste sentiment resented the influence of their Hindu neighbours on the Muslims of Bengal or India. Bose could not assess properly the nature and depth of resentment of the Muslims against their Hindu neighbours and trace its source. He like many other Indian nationalists in British India, blamed the divide and rule policy of the British for the origination and perpetuation of the Hindu – Muslim divide. He repeated the stock allegation of the Hindu nationalists against the British : "The reader will realize that the demand for independence from the stranglehold of traditional social system, which was vaguely manifested among the *namashudras*, appeared in a much sharper form among the Muslims, leading to the possibility of crippling the national unity. *The powerful divisive movements which drew sustenance from British rule* was in some measures successful in crippling the faint efforts at the elimination of caste distinctions that were being made by the Brahmins and related castes under the inspiration of nationalism" (Ibid. : 159 – 60); emphasis added). Bose's lack of clarity about the relationship of Hindus and Muslims in India in terms of the practice of caste rituals is evident (Cf. Bhattacharyya, 2013).

Dumont's writings threw a different light on the problem. Did the waves of Muslim intruders and their descendants and Indian converts to Islam become Hinduized, as both James Mill and Karl Max sometimes assumed? Or have they always interacted, and continue to interact, as representatives of mutually exclusive and mutually repulsive civilizations, on shifting terms of coexistence to the extent that each has always disturbed and changed the other, but neither has extirpated the other? Dumont's analysis suggests that the latter of the two views seemed plausible to him. The conquering Muslims have left infidels alive and the Hindus came to accept the rulers who could not be transformed into *Kshatriyas* as the Muslims refused to recognize the supremacy of the Brahmins. Coexistence of the two communities has, since the Muslim conquest of India, produced "no general ideological synthesis". As for the lower Muslims, who rubbed shoulders with the Hindus in the villages and themselves had castes or quasi-castes, the very form of "their cohabitation with the Hindus expresses a compromise" (Dumont, 1988 : 321). The relation between power and value as witnessed through the Muslim and British rule in India does not buttress



the allegation of nationalists against the British that it is the British who were responsible for the divisive tendencies in the relationship of the Hindus and the Muslims. "Contrary to what is often expressed, power does not automatically find its 'expression' in terms of values, and that the *coexistence was empirically accepted without being legitimized*, and was therefore, together with the cultural symbiosis, at the mercy of a change of power" (Ibid. : 322; emphasis added). The foregoing discussion suggests that Dumont was more analytical in considering the facts and values involved in Hindu-Muslim relationship in India and the two scholars viz., Bose and Dumont, did not see eye to eye with each other, though both Bose and Dumont remained silent on this point of difference between them.

However, there was a lot of agreement between the two anthropologists regarding the relation between the caste system and the institution of renouncer or *Sannyasi*. Both of them gave special importance to the renouncer in order to highlight the specificity of the Indian socio-cultural system in its comparison with the western system marked by emphasis on individualism. Both of them found in the institution of renouncer a safety valve for the Brahmanic order. Bose, for example, observes, "We may imagine that this safety valve [the institution of Sannyasa] was responsible, to a certain extent, for the stabilization of the Hindu order of society. Those who suffered from a feeling of oppression [of the social organization governed by the regime of caste] could escape and leave the organization itself to work as before" (1967 : 225; parenthesis added; cf. also Bose 1949 (Eng.trans. 1975) : 154). Dumont remarks that, the sannyasi or the extra-mundane individual "is the safety-valve for the Brahminic order, which can give a permanent place to the transcendent, while remaining out of the range of its attacks" (1988 : 279). Dumont further points out that Tantrism which is a truly fundamental variant of Hinduism and in which renunciation is replaced by reversal through rehabilitation of *bhoga* or enjoyment "builds upon what has been acquired through renunciation and has become at least a sort of universal language in India. In particular we are now, for ever, at the level of the religion of the individual. Not only do our texts speak of Yoga [discipline] but also of liberation" (1988 : 279 – 80).

Dumont in his comparison between the western society of modern times and the Indian society nurturing tradition and traditionalism contrasts individualism and equality of the former with holism and hierarchy of the latter. To make his point, he writes that to "consider Indian ideas from the point of view of the *individual-in-the-world, which is the spontaneous western point of view* is to run the risk of obscuring and limiting them". Indian ideas have two facets, one for the man-in-the-world, who is *not* an

individual, and the other for renouncer, who is an individual-outside-the world.

Bose as well as Dumont examined the connection between the individual known to have renounced the world and the mundane world of activities encompassed by the caste system in order to round off their respective analysis of the system. According to Dumont, the man-in-the-world, and particularly the Brahman is given the credit for ideas which he may have adopted but not invented. Such ideas are much more relevant for the ongoing social progresses and they clearly belong primarily to the thought of the renouncer.

N. K. Bose too mentioned how individual liberty was preserved in and by the caste system, which was marked by rigidity in matters of social customs and rituals, through the institution of Sannyasin. He even turns the table against the western society and culture which is otherwise known to have favoured and promoted liberty of individuals and seems to underscore the relative superiority of the socio-religious system linked with the institution of caste in this regard : "The Pharisees have always looked askance at outstanding individuals when the latter have tried to a new way of life, and then they have dealt with them as in the case of Socrates or of Jesus Christ" (Bose 1967 : 224). "India has been", Bose continues, "however a land in which, in spite of regimentation in many matters the freedom of the individual was held to be the supreme good" (Idem). Regimentation was necessary for the sake of collective economic and social welfare, but if it stood in the way of the progress of the individual, it lost all meaning. Definite arrangements were, therefore, made in India for releasing the individual from all forms of social obligation if he so desired, and actually stood in need of it.

The individual must be prepared to pay a heavy price for this release from the trammels of caste system governing the life of members of the system. He will have to surrender all the benefit normally derived from collective life. He will not expect any roof over his head, and will have to do with minimum clothes and with whatever food he may be granted by the alms-givers.

The prospect of deliverance of the individual from the iron law of caste ritual through the doors of sannyasa pales somewhat in the face of non-availability of this escape route for the non-Brahmins, as pointed out by Bose (but not by Dumont and Pocock). Bose writes "Higher Castes could enter into the Sannyasin's life without trouble. But if a *Vaishya* or *Sudra* wanted to renounce the world, he had to take special permission from the

king (Mahabharata Shanti parvam, ch. 63)" (Bose 1967 : 225). One sadly recalls here the Ramayana story, in which Rama, the king, killed, *Sambuka*, the *Sudra*, who practised penance in transgression of the social and ritual prohibition of penance by Sudras. Bose, however, points out, "Later on, in Indian history, when *Vaishnavism* and other reformatory sects became popular, the doors were opened wide to the *Sudras* as well as to women. And thus, in a way, this special arrangement for safeguarding the individual's freedom, acted like compensation against the totalitarian character of the system of caste. Each helped to render the other more stable and permanent" (Idem.).

There is a very large measure of similarity in the results of the comparison of the caste system with the western social system (including political and economic aspects) by Dumont and Bose which is why Bose admires Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (cf. Bose : 1971). And for the same reason Dumont mentions with great satisfaction Bose's overall approval of his work (Dumont, 1988 (1980). Preface to the complete English Edition). Of course, there are differences. The differences are prompted by the different objectives which have been followed by the two scholars. Dumont is insistent on that "hierarchy is a universal necessity, and that it will become manifest in some way, in covert, shame-faced or pathological forms in relation to the opposed ideals in force. In the United States, the most extreme individualistic environment, the abolition of slavery was followed in a few decades by the emergence of racism, by a strange but explicable alchemy; difference in social status is denied, only for discrimination on somatic grounds to emerge.... In the same way one may hope to explain the phenomena of totalitarianism, not indeed by means of formulae, but in terms of an analysis which fits the facts as closely as possible" (Dumont, 1980 : 237). He found and wanted to present the most faithful picture of hierarchy in the Indian caste system. And, one must say that he performed the task most adroitly and admirably.

Nirmal Kumar Bose was a nationalist and freedom fighter following the Gandhian path. He sought to highlight the elements and spirit of unity of the Indians in their cultural resilience against the colonial hegemony. Even the caste-system which despite its inbuilt feature of invidious distinction and discrimination by the Brahmans and other upper castes against the lower castes appeared to him a system of interdependence and consequent unity of the people of India. Bose mentioned elsewhere the intellectual climate in India in the colonial period in which the British travellers, missionaries and historians were quite often impressed by the differences between castes, classes, regions, and linguistic communities and these differences were frequently emphasized more than similarities. The Indian scholars beholden

to the colonial masters and other members of their tribe toed their line. "On the other hand, there were others who reacted against their *subtle domination* in the intellectual field, and became nationalistically minded even in their scientific interests. They tried to emphasize similarities, sought justification for values which are often overlooked, and produced a *contrary picture to that produced by those who believed in the 'superiority' of western civilization*" (emphasis added). Bose admitted that both these intellectual biases introduced distortion of one sort or another in the meta narrative and analysis of the social and cultural reality of India by the social scientists. But, he himself, it seems, could not remain free from the nationalistic bias in his review of the Indian caste system.

Bose himself suggests the areas where he agrees with Dumont and the places where he differs from him. He is in general agreement with Dumont regarding the bonds which hold together the separate components of the Indian social structure in a framework of interdependence and also in relation to the connection between the caste system and *sannyasa*. But, he feels that "the economic ties (or the position of the components relative to one another in the productive organization) [of caste] have been given [by Dumont] less importance than they should. Ritual bondages based on the pollution / purity complex seem to have been overvalued. In different areas of India, or among various classes within the same area, where caste-based production is still viable, loyalty to caste's ritual elements seem to persist more strongly than in sectors where the old system of production has been yielding to the pressure of another, based on free enterprise and competition" (Bose, 1971). In case of confrontation of the old system of production with the new, "the ritual bondages seem to be the first casualty; except among prosperous castes which can maintain a double loyalty to the new and the old by dividing up their lives into an uncoordinated inner and outer compartment[s]" (Ibid).

It is not difficult to follow Bose's ideas regarding the probable change in the life of the people encompassed by the caste system which comes to face the changing productive organization experienced in the modern world propelled by the ever new innovations attempted in the west. But, the same judgment is not delivered by many in relation to Dumont and Dumont himself is responsible for such an impression. Indeed, Dumont has been criticised as a painter of an unchanging and unchangeable India. For he has not squarely faced the question of whether or how the caste system has changed or is going to change. One has to depend on *obiter dicta* uttered by Dumont in this respect. 'Provisional conclusion' of *Homo Hierarchius* notes that the outcome of the interaction between the British [western and individualist] and Indian civilization [upholding the value of hierarchy] has

been attenuation of the latter. But, "modification however genuine it may be remains incomplete". The "ideological core of the caste system" remains in tact, its "plasticity" ensures that "everything happens as if the system tolerated change only within.....its secondary spheres.... The facts display neither reinforcement nor any essential transformation of the system, but only a change involving its minor areas" (Dumont, 1980 : 228). And, the above situation prevails despite "the emergence and development of modern professions, usually neutral from the religious point of view, and urban development; territorial unification and new spatial mobility; emancipation of economics and development of the market economy" (Ibid : 229). Dumont's portrayal of the "contemporary trend" in the Indian society and culture might have made Arun Bose remark, "Changes are not ignored [by Dumont] though they are definitely classified as secondary". (Bose, 1989, parenthesis added). But should India be changed, or can it be changed with respect to the 'primary and major' areas or is its age-old social system unchangeable in this sense? Dumont feels inhibited in providing a clear answer to the question.

Does Dumont, suggest that there should not be any kind of change in the caste system and that the untouchables should continue to suffer insufferable situation bred by this caste system for them? Not at all. He rather criticizes the "liberal" anthropologists and sociologists of India such as G. S. Ghurye who believe in the possibility of a transformation which would end caste while preserving Brahmanism and interdependence of Brahmins and the rest. Dumont concludes that the abolition of caste and caste based activities leading to the practice of untouchability is likely to lie in caste actions and that only the content of a caste action indicates whether it militates for or against caste. "*Not to recognize this is to remain within the traditional Indian way of thinking*" (Ibid.: 223; emphasis added). Dumont never suggests that the Indian readers of his work should try to preserve and continue what is there in the Indian socio cultural system particularly in relation to caste. He wants them to rue that "Nothing is more deplorable than the failure of Ambedkar and of the untouchable movement, for it is clear today, *contrary to Gandhi's opinion*, that the untouchables will not be finally emancipated save by themselves : the good will of their politician superiors cannot be enough" (Idem; emphasis added). Dumont's reference to Gandhi in this case originates, according to N. K. Bose, from grave misunderstanding. He avers that [a]ll his life Gandhi taught the oppressed that those who suffered had to straighten up their backs. This he did particularly during the Vaikam and Guruvaiyyur Satyagrahas in 1927 in respect of untouchability. When there was a danger of the British Government creating a further division in India by means of its proposal for separate electorate for the "Depressed Classes", Gandhi registered his

protest by a fast unto death. "But this was to checkmate a British political move, and not to take away power from the untouchables and hand it over to politicians". Gandhi was a great believer in direct action of a non-violent nature.

Dumont considers Bose's comments on his work, *Homo Hierarchicus* as a 'word of his support' for it, in which "he expressed reservations only with respect to details" (1980 : xiii). Bose too writes that "the slight matters of inaccuracy" made by Dumont regarding Gandhi's role in relation to the Dalits' emancipation from the bondage of caste should not deter "us from registering our unqualified appreciation of the work" produced by Louis Dumont.

A comparative view of the applications of comparative method by Louis Dumont and N. K. Bose in analyzing caste seems rewarding. It reveals the predicaments faced by the two scholars in analyzing the nature and working of the institution of caste which, their analyses amply demonstrate, has several special features as an expression of social inequality. The predicaments relate to an adequate explanation of multi-cultural societies such as the Indian society and of the interface of tradition and modernity - are they dichotomous and irreconcilable or a negotiation is a plausible phenomenon? Their analyses throw new light on an eternal problem of sociology, viz., the relation of society and its control and individual and his/her freedom.

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*Journal of the Department of Sociology, University of Calcutta*

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## Swami Vivekananda's Vision of India's Progress and Contemporary Social Realities

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**"There is implanted in every man a strong desire for progress..."**

(Vivekananda, *Modern India*, Eng.trans., , 2008)

ONE hundred and fifty years have elapsed since Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was born. Since his demise, he has been raised to the status of a demi-god by hero worshipping Indians. But Swami Vivekananda was an outstanding social reformer, a great patriot and a severe critic of Indian society. He made a number of prescriptions on progressive social change which, if correctly followed, would have made India into a great power. Vivekananda regarded India as *Punyabhumi*. He felt that India has greatly contributed to the intellectual development of human civilization in the past and has much to teach the present day world. He identified a number of factors behind India's fall, namely, our inability to organize as a nation, neglect of the masses, mass oppression in the name of religion, monopoly of education by the priestly and literate classes, and neglect of women. Vivekananda advised Indians to organize as a nation, forecast the rise of the *shudras*, stressed on man making education, and advocated liberation and upliftment of women.

Vivekananda's call to Indians to organize as a nation has had a forceful impact on them. The Indian National Movement finally succeeded in its aims to liberate India from British thralldom when India became independent in 1947, but independent India emerged as a divided nation proving Vivekananda's criticism that Indians can never work unitedly. Vivekananda rightly forecast the rise of the *shudras* but the majority of Indians still live in abject poverty and misery. Caste and communal conflicts poison our lives while our political leaders play political games in the name of reservation. Vivekananda advocated man making education man making education is yet to take off in India. Vivekananda advocated liberation and upliftment of women. But, though women

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*have progressed a lot, they are still oppressed at home and in society. To conclude, Vivekananda's conception of progress is an idealist one. It is similar to that of Comte. India is still in what Comte would have called the theological stage of social development. Though India has made great material progress, Indians have yet to make significant social progress.*

A revised version of the paper read at the 38<sup>th</sup> All India Sociological Conference, held at Mohanlal Sukhadia University, Udaipur, Rajasthan, India, from 27-29 December, 2012.

## **Introduction**

India is celebrating the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of her patron saint, Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) in 2012-13. In his lifetime, Vivekananda emerged as a charismatic leader long before Max Weber made the term *charismatic authority* popular in sociological discourse. As one of his female American disciples, S.E.Waldo remarked, "*It was a perpetual inspiration to live with a man like Swami Vivekananda. From morning till night it was ever the same, we lived in a constant atmosphere of intense spirituality. Often playful and fun loving, full of merry jest and quick repartee, he was never far from the dominating note of his life*"<sup>1</sup>. Since his demise in 1902, Vivekananda has been elevated to the status of a demi-god by hero worshipping Indians. One of them is 69 year old Rajaram Gupta of Khetri, where Vivekananda spent the most significant part of his life as a Sannyasi after Belur. Gupta regularly worships a handwritten letter Vivekananda sent to his ancestor, Gobinda Sahay<sup>2</sup>. In an essay (Bandyopadhyay, 2012), I have shown that Swami Vivekananda was an outstanding human being. He was a social reformer, a great patriot, a builder of institutions which remain vibrant to this day, a staunch defender of the Indian way of life to the affluent West and a strong critic and reformer of Indian society of his time. In 1985, the Government of India declared 12<sup>th</sup> January, the birthday of Swami Vivekananda as *National Youth Day* thus making him a youth icon. To commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Vivekananda, in 2012, numerous programmes have been organized in India. They include organizing seminars and conferences<sup>3</sup>, release and rerelease of films, video or audio documentaries<sup>4</sup>, book releases,<sup>5</sup> new research centres<sup>6</sup>, and political rallies<sup>7</sup>. Summing up the contributions of Swami Vivekananda, Swami Lokeshwarananda observed that he made *three* predictions *two* of which have come true. Firstly, way back in the nineties of the nineteenth century, Swami Vivekananda predicted that India would become free within fifty years. At that time no

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one believed that this would happen. But within fifty years of his death India did become free (on August 15, 1947). Secondly, Vivekananda predicted that the first proletarian revolution would happen either in Russia or in China. Here again, no one thought at that time that this could happen. The November Revolution in Russia (1917) proved him right. The third prediction Vivekananda made was that India would one day rise to great heights of prosperity and power. But Lokeshwarananda regretted that present picture of India "gives no hint of such a possibility" (Lokeshwarananda, 2008) How justified is Lokeshwarananda?

### ***Major research questions***

"Nothing Swami Vivekananda preached is outdated" observes Swami Lokeshwarananda (Lokeshwarananda, 2008). The objective of the present study is to examine firstly what was Vivekananda's vision of India's progress and then examine the contemporary social reality. I have chosen to focus on Vivekananda's conception of Indian history, his vision of how India should progress, his ideas on nation building and his plan of action to build a nation, his conception of education, caste and untouchability, upliftment of women and socialism. At the same time we seek to answer a number of questions regarding contemporary India. Following Vivekananda, we will first discuss the following research questions.

What is society and how does it evolve? How does society lose its vitality?

What makes a nation great?

What is progress?

What is the cause of India's downfall? How is India to progress?

How should national rejuvenation be done? What was Vivekananda's plan of action? Who will take the lead in rejuvenating India?

What is education? Does the present education system contribute to all round development of children?

Have caste prejudices disappeared? Have the lower castes been integrated into the mainstream of Indian society? Has reservation contributed to decline in inequality?

What is the present status of women in Indian society?

What is socialism? Has India really become a socialist society?

### ***Organization of the Work***

This work is divided into four sections. Section I is the introductory section. Section II deals with Vivekananda's vision of how India should progress. Section III analyses social change in contemporary India and examines how

far Vivekananda's ideals are reflected in it. It is followed by Section IV which is the discussion section. Here I have examined how far progressive social change has taken place in India. It is followed by Section-V, the concluding section.

## **Swami Vivekananda's Vision of India's Progress**

### **I. What is Society and How Does it Evolve?**

Now, let us first examine, from Vivekananda's perspective, what society is and how it evolves. According to Vivekananda, society evolved from a common sense of danger, a common cause of hatred or love. "By the same law that herds beasts of prey together, men also unite into a body and form a caste or nation of their own." (Nirvedananda, 2012, p. 1) He traced the evolution of the Indian state to the intermingling of races. To give an explanation into the nature of conflicts in ancient India, he delved deep into Hindu mythology. The *Devas*, he said, were intellectually superior to the *Asuras*. While *Asuras* were superior to the *Devas* in physical strength and lived in hills and caves, the *Devas*, were civilized and lived in villages and towns. The intellectual superiority of the *Devas*, enabled them to outwit the *Asuras* and rule them. But, I think, that he carried the comparison too far when he claimed that the Europeans are the sons of *Asuras* and Indians are sons of *Devas*. (Nirvedananda, 2012, p. 6). To the Indian mind, *Asuras* are the embodiment of all that is evil and the *Devas* are the embodiment of all that is good. Can we say that the British empire in India was an *evil empire*? Did nothing good emerge out of it? If that is the case then why did Vivekananda (2012 : 40) advocate growth, expansion and development along national lines? After all, nationalism is a product of modern western society. Vivekananda (Nirvedananda, 2012, p. 4) however, correctly observed that modern societies, customs and manners emerged out of a fusion of races.

According to Vivekananda, "Two attempts have been made in the world to found social life: the one upon religion, and the other upon social necessity. The one was founded on spirituality, the other upon materialism; the one upon transcendentalism, the other upon realism" (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 27). The spiritual side initially prevails and then the material side. Vivekananda favoured spiritualism and was opposed to materialism because he thought that it brings greed, conflicts and destruction in its wake.

Vivekananda pleaded for the unity of the human race.

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There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual- to know that I and my brother are *one*. This is true of all countries and of all people. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 29). Vivekananda thought that society loses its vitality when the necessity of an idea as an element of preservation of the world is destroyed. The degeneration of Indian society came about not because Indian customs were bad but because they were not allowed to be carried to their legitimate conclusion (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 30).

For Vivekananda) three things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great.

1. Conviction of the powers of goodness.
2. Absence of jealousy and suspicion.
3. Helping all those who are trying to be and to do good. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 42)

## **II. Vivekananda's Idea of Progress**

Like Turgot and Condorcet, Vivekananda was convinced of the inevitability of progress. Like Comte, who mainly emphasized the role of ideas and unlike Marx, who was a materialist, Vivekananda adopts an idealistic approach to history. For him, "The history of civilization is the progressive reading of spirit into matter" (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 46). Two forces seem to be working in nature. One of the forces is constantly differentiating and the other is constantly unifying. The progress of civilization means controlling nature. Different races take to different processes in controlling nature. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 47).

Vivekananda held that society progresses when there is both accumulation and distribution of power. Just as the accumulation of blood is necessary in the heart, its non-circulation will mean death to the body. He saw the spread of education in society as the *sine qua non* for progress.

From the day education and culture began to spread gradually from patricians to plebian grew the distinction of modern civilization as of western countries, and of ancient civilizations, Egypt, Rome, etc. I see before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion that education and intelligence spread among the masses (Vivekananda, 2012, pp. 52-53).

### **III. Causes of the fall of India. How will she Progress?**

Wherever he went, Vivekananda tried his best to portray India in a favourable light. For him, India was the *punjabhumi*. To his followers he said, "... be proud that thou art an Indian" (Lokeshwarananda, 2008, p. 72). The Indian nation cannot be killed. Deathless it stands, and will stand so long as that spirit will remain in the background, so long as her people do not give up their spirituality. (Nirvedananda, 2012, pp. 52-3).

Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was and mark my words, it never will be. (Vivekananda, 2012, pp. 52-53).

But Vivekananda was also highly critical of Indian social and political practices. Looking back at Indian history, he observed that nowhere do we find subject people taking any part in the affairs of the State. . (Vivekananda, 2008: 7). As a result, people become politically apathetic.

Such a nation, being entirely dependent on the king for everything and never caring to exert itself for the common good, for self –defence , becomes gradually destitute of inherent energy and strength. If this state of dependence and protection continues long, it becomes the cause for destruction of the nation ,. And its ruin is not far to seek (Lokeshwarananda, 2008, pp. 10-11).

India's progress, for Vivekananda, is associated with social change and rise of the subject classes. Vivekananda confidently predicted the rise of the Shudras.

*Yet a time will come when there will be a rising of the Shudra class with their Shudrahood* that is to say, not like that as at present when the *Shudras* are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaidyas, the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the *Shudras* of every country, with their inborn nature and habits ... will gain absolute supremacy in every society. (Lokeshwarananda, 2008, p. 53) (.Bold letters mine).

Vivekananda predicted that Socialism, Anarchism, Nihilism, etc. are the vanguard of the social revolution that will follow. (Lokeshwarananda, 2008, pp. 34-35).

#### **IV. National Rejuvenation**

Vivekananda was a patriot and he had his own ideals about patriotism. He said that three requisites are necessary for any great achievement. First, feel from the heart. Secondly, have you found a way out, any practical solution? Thirdly, "have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstacles? (Vivekananda, 2012, pp. 142-216). Vivekananda stressed again and again the need for national unity. For example, in a lecture entitled "The Future of India" he said: "Being of one mind is the secret of society ". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 230) For a great future of India, he observed, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power and coordination of wills. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 229) . Vivekananda rightly condemned caste disunity which he knew was a major impediment to national unity. "I regret that in modern times there should be so much dissention between castes. This must stop". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 227) .Vivekananda wanted growth, expansion and development along national lines. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 107)

#### ***Vivekananda's plan of action for India's regeneration.***

In "My Plan of Campaign", a lecture delivered at the Victoria Hall, Madras, Vivekananda outlined his plan of action for national rejuvenation. First and foremost, the nation has to be educated, our legislative body has to be created and then the law will be forthcoming. "First create the power, the sanction from which the law will spring". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 131).He asserted that it is people who will give sanction to the new law. Vivekananda asserted that we have to first deluge the land with spiritual ideas .But "*It is man -making religion that we want. It is man- making theories that we want. It is man- making education that we want*". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 141)(Emphasis mine).He planned to start institutions to train young men to preach the scriptures with a missionary zeal.

#### **Role of Youth**

Vivekananda had great faith on the power of youth whom he exhorted to serve the nation.

Now ...I want young men. "It is the young, the strong and healthy of sharp intellect that will reach the Lord," says the Vedas. This is the time to decide your future –while you possess the energy of youth.



Rouse yourselves for life is short. There are greater works to be done than aspiring to be lawyers...A far greater work is this sacrifice for the benefit of your race... (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 235).

## **V. Education and Social Progress**

### ***Critique of Colonial Education***

Swami Vivekananda was so much interested in education that he translated a book on the subject by Herbert Spencer, entitled *Education*, into Bengali (Vivekananda S., 2008) Swami Vivekananda severely criticized the colonial education system. In a lecture entitled "The Future of India", he argued that the colonial system of education is not a man making education. It is merely a negative education.

The child is taken to school, and the first thing he learns is that his father is a fool, the second thing that his grandfather is a lunatic, the third thing that all his teachers are hypocrites, the fourth thing that all sacred books are lies! By the time he turns sixteen he is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless. And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced one original man in all the three Presidencies. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 232).

He argued that the colonial system of education is too literary an education, divorced from reality. The present university system, he argued in an interview, "is nothing but a perfect machine for turning out clerks" (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 90). It creates parrots of our boys and ruins their brains by cramming too many subjects into them (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 87) It creates 'educated' youths who like to master details of everything outside India "but if you ask them they do not know the names of their forefathers up to the seventh generation not to speak of the fourteenth" (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 90)

### ***Vivekananda's Concept of Education***

Then what, for Vivekananda, is education? For him, "*Education is the perfection already in man.*" (Vivekananda, 2011, p.7). He argued that no one can really teach another. The external teacher only gives only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to understand things. He said that we should only give positive ideas. Negative thoughts only weaken men. He argued that liberty is the first condition of growth. (Vivekananda, 2011, pp. 8-11). Unless a student has freedom to learn, to experiment, one will never truly learn. Above all, Vivekananda argued, "*We must have life-*

*building, man making, character-making assimilation of ideas*". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 233) *Italics mine*).

To solve the problem of educating our children, Vivekananda argued firstly, that we must have the whole education system, both spiritual and secular, in our hands. Education must run along national lines and on national methods, as far as practicable. Secondly, he laid emphasis on proper training of teachers. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 234) Thirdly, Vivekananda argued that the child's education should be in the mother tongue. "Every man is capable of receiving knowledge if it is imparted in his own language." (Vivekananda, 2011a:82). Fourthly, he argued that people should get technical education which will enable them to earn their living. (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 91) Fifthly, he advocated physical education. "You must learn to make the physique very strong and teach the same to others". (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 91) For proper development of the human being, he argued knowledge of the arts and music is also necessary. Sixthly, Vivekananda was a strong votary of women's education. "Educate the women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them". (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 774). He argued that women must not only be taught the essence of housekeeping, culinary work, and child rearing. They should also be taught *self defence*. Above all, he advocated the education of the masses. "*A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence is spread among the masses*." (Vivekananda, 2011, p. 68).

## VI. Caste and Social Progress

Casteism, which inculcated caste values among the people, leading to oppression by the higher castes of the lower castes, was sanctified by religion. *The Purusha Sukta* of *Rgveda* (RX 90.12) says:

"[Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya (farmer and trader) and Sudra (labourer) are all of Divine origin being born of the body of Purusha, the Supreme Person sanctified for creation.]

*His mouth became the Brahmana, his arms the Kshatriya, his thighs the Vaishyas, and his feet, the Sudras.*" (Bose, 1977, p. 89) (Emphasis mine)

So here is the justification for keeping the lower castes in perpetual thralldom to the upper castes. Since the Sudras were born from the Purusha's feet, they are only to serve the upper castes in society.

But Vivekananda argued that *caste is simply the outgrowth of political institutions in India. It is a hereditary trade guild.* (Nirvedananda, 2012, p. 63) (Italics mine.). He argued that everyone from Buddha to Rammohun made the mistake of holding caste to be a religious institution and tried to pull down religion and caste and failed. But in contemporary India, caste is, “simply a crystallized social institution which after fulfilling its service is now filling the atmosphere with its stench, and can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social individuality”. (Vivekananda, 2012., p. 124). *Vivekananda was against abolition of caste.* But at the same time, as I mentioned earlier, he criticized the prevalent practice of untouchability. (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 75). He advocated progressive social change through upliftment of the lower castes. “*The whole work is to raise the Candala up to the Brahmin*” (Nirvedananda, 2012, p. 70) (Italics mine). And this, he argues, can be done *only* through education. Vivekananda repeatedly stressed on greater educational help to the lower castes. In an address at Ramnad, after his return from the West, Vivekananda argued that if the Brahmin is born clever, he can educate himself without help. “If others are not born clever let them all have the teachings and teachers they In another work, Vivekananda argued, “*If the son of a Brahmin needs one teacher, that of a Chandala needs ten. For, greater help must be given to him whom nature has not endowed with acute intellect from birth.*” (Vivekananda, 2012., p. 125) . (Italics mine).

## **VII. Women and Social Progress**

### ***Vivekananda's image of women***

For Vivekananda, the ideal Indian woman is a sufferer. Sita and Savitri are the ideal Indian women. “The height of a woman’s ambition is to be like Sita, the pure, the devoted, the all suffering!” (Vivekananda 1982:1). The Indian conception of woman differs from the western conception. According to him, the ideal Indian woman is “*the mother first and the mother last*”. In contrast, in the West “The woman is wife.” (Vivekananda S., 1982, p. 14) (Italics added).

Vivekananda claims that the Indian women are generally very happy as there are not many cases of quarrelling between couples, whereas in the United States, the number of unhappy homes and marriages is large. (Vivekananda 1982:20-21). At the same time he told a disciple, “*All nations on earth have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have*

*no respect for these living images of Shakti?*". (Vivekananda S., 1982, p. 26) (Italics mine).

***Vivekananda's opinion on progress and upliftment of women.***

Vivekananda realized that upliftment of women, is essential for national regeneration. Vivekananda laid great importance on education. In 1897, he pointed out to a disciple, "It is seen from official statistics that only three or four percent of the people in India are educated, and not even one percent of the women". (Ashrama, 2010, p. 74). He asked a disciple, to "open girls' schools in every village and try to uplift them. *If women are raised then their children will, by their noble actions glorify the name of the country, then will culture, knowledge, power, and devotion awaken in this country*" (Vivekananda S., 1982, p. 33) (Italics added).

**VIII. Social Change, Democracy, Socialism**

Finally, let us discuss Vivekananda's conception of Social change, Democracy and Socialism.

***Vivekananda's conception of Social Change***

Vivekananda claimed to be a radical reformer. In his lecture, "My Plan of Campaign", he said:

To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. *I want root- and- branch reform.* Where we differ is the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth. (Vivekananda S., 2012, p. 129) (Emphasis mine)

Vivekananda suggested radical reform of Indian society. He recommended that there should be "salvation of the people by the people" (Vivekananda S., 2012., p. 140). His first suggestion was to raise the condition of the masses. Their rights have to be restored. The masses have to be united by assimilating various elements into which India is composed. Secondly, he noted that the lower classes are gradually awakening and are determined to exact what they perceive to be their legitimate dues. The main problem is to channelize and bring order into their disorderly movements. He warned the rich and educated classes. "When the masses will wake up, they will come to understand your oppression of them, and by a puff of their mouth you will be entirely blown away"! (Vivekananda S., 2012., pp. 146-147). Thirdly, Vivekananda laid great stress on the role of education for

bringing about social change."Intelligence must not remain the monopoly of the cultured few. It must be disseminated from the higher to lower classes. Education is coming and compulsory education will follow". (Vivekananda S. , 2012., p. 151).

The youth, in his view, will play a vanguard role in bringing about social change.

*You young men..., are to work out the salvation of India*

Because you have nothing you will be sincere. Because you are sincere, you will be ready to renounce all. That is what I am now telling you. Once more I repeat this to you. This is your mission in life. This is my mission in life. (Vivekananda S., 2012., pp. 141-142) (Emphasis mine)

### ***Vivekananda's conception of Democracy and Socialism***

Finally we will discuss Vivekananda's conception of democracy and socialism. For him, society has always to resolve whether *vyasthi* (part or the individual) will sacrifice itself for *samasti* (the whole), or whether the individual should have freedom. Out of this discourse arise the twin conceptions of individualism and socialism. *"The doctrine which demands the sacrifice of individual freedom to social supremacy is called socialism, while that which advocates the cause of the individual is called individualism"*. (Vivekananda S. , 2012., p. 127) (Italics added).

Vivekananda observed that one advantage of democracy is that the West always had freedom .He was impressed with that freedom, that spirit of self-reliance, unity of purpose and thirst for improvement which characterizes the Western civilization. But western democracy is not without its defects. In the West, it is always victory of the strong, and death of the weak. He was disgusted with the wiles and guiles of politicians and businessmen. "The western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks. All things that you hear about –constitutional government, freedom, liberty and parliaments-are jokes." (Vivekananda S., 2012. p.129).

Vivekananda regarded himself as a socialist. "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but a loaf is better than no bread." (Vivekananda S.2012. p.130). He saw the advantages of socialism in the doing routine work well, distribution of physical comforts, and equitable distribution of ordinary education. (Vivekananda S., 2012., p.129). On the flip side, according to Vivekananda, people are guided by lifeless machines. There is

no mental activity, no attempt at innovation, no desire for novelty, no appreciation of new things. (Vivekananda S. 2012. p.129).

## **India after Vivekananda**

Vivekananda' died in 1902 but the Ramakrishna Mission established by him is continuing the good work which he started, serving the poor and downtrodden, and giving relief to people in times of natural calamities, etc. But how far have Indians followed his teachings? Has progressive social change really taken place in Independent India? We will discuss this question with regard to five major issues-Nationalism, education, women's empowerment, caste and socialism.

### ***I. Indian Nationalism***

The impact of Vivekananda on the Indian national movement was acknowledged by leading social scientists like A.R. Desai. Desai, who sociologically analyzed Indian nationalism, observed that the self preservative will in Indians was perhaps stronger than anywhere else in the world. (Desai, 1984, p. 5) Indian nationalism emerged under conditions of subjugation to British rule and the religious reform movements were the expression of rising national consciousness. The Ramakrishna movement, in Desai's view, idealized Hinduism. It aimed at the spiritual conquest of the world for revived Hinduism. Indian nationalism, Desai pointed out, was initially influenced by the neo-Vedantic movement of Swami Vivekananda. (Desai, 1984, p. 295). Later, Gandhi gave the movement a religio-ethical direction and this alienated those who wanted the movement to be run on secular lines. (Desai, 1984, p. 298) Can Jinnah's movement for Pakistan be explained by his alienation from the national movement?

Vivekananda had repeatedly warned his countrymen against disunity and infighting. So did another national leader, Babasaheb Ambedkar. In his Presidential Address at the All India Depressed Classes Congress on August 8, 1930, Ambedkar claimed that the demand for Independence is "impracticable". According to him, "*It is only people cemented by feeling for one country, one constitution and one destiny who may take the risk of being independent*". No one can deny that the country is miles distant from this position" (Ambedkar, 2010, p. 20) (*Italics author's*). The subsequent history of India proved the truth of Ambedkar's thesis. The Indians fell prey to the British policy of *divide-et impera*. Hindu-Muslim relations deteriorated to such an extent that the Muslims fought for a separate homeland of their own. The result was vivisection of India into two self-

governing dominions-India and Pakistan in 1947. So, the Indian national movement failed to maintain its unity till the end. And this was certainly antithetical to Vivekananda's ideal of national unity.

## ***II. Education in Contemporary India***

Vivekananda's conceived of education in a holistic manner. "*We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet.*" (Vivekananda, 1982: 38 Italics added) "*We must have life-building, man making, character –making assimilation of ideas*". (Vivekananda, 2012, p. 233) Italics mine). How far does education in contemporary India measure up to the lofty standards set by Vivekananda?

### ***Education & Language Policy***

The colonial regime introduced education in a foreign language, namely English, to create educated youths who will fulfill Macaulay's aspiration of creating people who will be Indians in blood and colour but English in tastes, in opinions, morals and in Intellect. After Independence, there have been several policy changes in the field of education. Vivekananda and many other Indians including Rabindranath Tagore had advocated instruction in the mother tongue. Education has been introduced in the mother tongue from KG to PG. It is now possible to write a Ph.D. thesis in the social sciences in one's mother tongue if it is one of the languages recognized by the Constitution. But despite all these improvements, *students opting to study in their mother tongue remain second class citizens*. (Gobalakrishnan, 2012) found that students who completed their courses in the mother tongue find it difficult to understand the subjects as well as various concepts in professional courses. They are also unable to compete with students who completed their school education in English and develop an inferiority complex. Yet in all countries education is primarily imparted in the mother tongue. Our educational planners should find ways and means to resolve this problem-how to make professional courses more comprehensible to students who did their school education in the mother tongue.

### ***Corporal Punishment***

Vivekananda argued that, "*We must have life-building, man making, character –making assimilation of ideas*". (Vivekananda S. , Lectures from Colombo to Almora, Third Edition, , 34th reprint, 2012, p. 233) (Italics mine) But character –building education is *not* at all a priority in 21<sup>st</sup>

century India. There is growing commercialization and corporatization of education. Schools are more and more resembling borstals or prison houses. Few schools can claim to be temples of learning. Teachers are behaving more like prison guards or policemen whose only objective is to harass and humiliate students. *Corporal punishment* and blatant child abuse in schools is the order of the day. *The UNESCO Committee on the Rights of the Child in the General Comment No.8 defines 'corporal' or 'physical' punishment, "any punishment in which physical force is used and intended to cause some degree of pain or discomfort, however light. Most involves hitting ("smacking", "slapping", "spanking") children, with the hand or with an implement....."* In the view of the Committee, *corporal punishment is invariably degrading.* A survey of 6623 children by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) showed that 81.2% had been subject to outward rejection by being told that they were not capable of learning or some other verbal abuse<sup>8</sup> Cases have come to light where students have been maimed, and even murdered by sadists masquerading as teachers. A recent case is that of 10 year old Aslam Ansari, who sustained backbone and neck injuries after being thrashed by two teachers on November 16, 2012. He died in hospital in Betul district of Madhya Pradesh<sup>9</sup> That the majority of youths aspiring to be teachers are ill equipped to meet the demands of their profession is proved by results of a test by the Central Board of Secondary Education. It showed that only 7% of the 7.85 lakh examinees passed the Central Teacher Eligibility Test instituted in 2011 which is a mandatory course instituted under the Right to Education Act. (Kaushik, 2013).

### ***Sexual Harassment***

Apart from corporal punishment, sexual harassment cases are occurring in schools. In one recent case, the principal of a missionary school in Kolkata was arrested for sexually harassing a female student. A case under Section 341A(i) was lodged against the accused who is allegedly a repeat offender.<sup>10</sup> In an interview to *The Telegraph*, the victim narrated in detail how she was molested by her principal.<sup>11</sup> MP Derek O'Brien, remarked, "I am stunned by the depravity of the crime".<sup>12</sup>

In my opinion the system of teacher training and teacher selection should be thoroughly overhauled. Psychiatric evaluation of primary and secondary teachers should form part of the selection process followed by periodic checkups. In this way, paedophiles and other perverts may be denied entry to the noble profession of teaching. Only those individuals who are



sensitive to the needs of the students, who properly understand child psychology, should be appointed as teachers.

### ***Ragging***

A reprehensible practice among college going senior students that plagues our higher education system is ragging. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1995) defined 'ragging' as "tease, torment, play rough jokes", etc. Senior students are not the only ones who commit these atrocities for the fun of it. Sometimes professors also join in the 'fun', as did Professor Mayur Gupta of the Architecture department of M.S. University, Vadodara. He was arrested by the police after being accused of participating in the ragging of fresher Harshavardhan Sutaria in the campus<sup>13</sup>.

So, how do our freshers fare in the college campus? Here are some examples. In Coimbatore, a first year student landed in hospital after being severely beaten up by senior students<sup>14</sup>. Girls can be equally brutal in their behavior. A student of Class XI in a Pune junior college had to be hospitalized after being made to endure a one month torture by the senior girls. Non-vegetarian food was forced down her mouth though she was a vegetarian, her two wheeler was used without her permission, and she was taunted about not having a boyfriend. Her parents eventually withdrew her from the college and lodged a formal complaint with the authorities<sup>15</sup>.

The UGC, on the directions of the Supreme Court, has launched *National Ragging Prevention Project*<sup>16</sup>. How far will this programme reduce ragging? Making ragging a criminal offence and counseling senior college students on the phenomenon will go a long way to solve the problem. Senior school students, studying at the Plus II level, should also be counseled on ragging.

### ***Political violence in educational institutions***

In higher education, we find a veritable civil war going on between the teachers and students on one hand and between students themselves. Delivering his address at the XXXIII convocation of The University of Burdwan in West Bengal, the Governor of West Bengal and Chancellor of the university, Mayankote Kelath Narayanan said, "the behavior of students in quite a few colleges in the state do not measure up to what is expected of a college or university student. *Some have even committed the cardinal sin of manhandling the teachers and principals*"<sup>17,18</sup>. The Chancellor, also accused the teachers of being unwilling or unable to

control the trouble makers. Instead of blaming teachers and principals of colleges, the chancellor should have pointed out that outside political interference in educational institutions is mainly responsible for the growing incidence of campus violence in the state. From Sen's<sup>18</sup> analysis of a number of incidents of campus violence (10 December, 2011-11 January, 2012), we find that out of 11 cases of campus violence, 4 were perpetrated by outsiders and seven by politicalised students groups, Students' Federation of India, Chattra Parishad, and Trinamul Chattra Parishad were to blame for student violence in the campuses. In case of outsider led violence, the Trinamul leaders were responsible. There have been calls to stall elections for a year and the utility of students unions in representing the interests of the students have been questioned by educationists like Sukanta Chaudhury. (Chaudhury, 1418, p. 4). As recent student union elections in two colleges of Burdwan show, political violence in the campus is having a negative effect on voting behavior of students. In Burdwan Women's College, only 17 of the 1200 voters turned up, while in Vivekananda Mahavidyalay, only 47 of the 3000 students voted<sup>19</sup>

### ***Functional Illiteracy***

Even after 65 years of Independence, India has yet to make much progress in the education front. "India has made a lot of progress in achieving education for all, but what kind of education is being imparted and whether there are adequate teachers are issues of concern. The result is functional illiteracy" UNESCO Director –General Irina Bokova said on the sidelines of a conference by E9 (Education 9) countries<sup>20</sup> "Functional illiteracy" refers to *inadequate reading and writing skills that leave a person unable to manage any employment task*. Research findings support her assertion. A report by the NGO, *Pratham*, and the results of tests by an international body, the *Programme for International Students Assessment (Pisa)* have shown that Indian school children learn little in school. The Pratham report said nearly half of Class V students in rural schools were unable to read Class II texts in 2011. India was ranked second from the bottom among 73 countries in Pisa's international test on mathematics and the sciences for 15 year olds<sup>21</sup> This report supports the assertion of Bokova. Following the huge embarrassment suffered by India from the results of PISA 2009, the government did not even apply for PISA 2011 and 2012<sup>22</sup> Will such avoidance solve the problem of quality in secondary education?

### ***Student violence over failure in examinations***

It is clear that all is not well with education in India. Matters are getting worse day by day with in West Bengal with political leaders poking their heads in academic matters. Are we to believe that a teacher has no right to independently assess a student's capability of facing a Board examination? The recent incidence of student violence in a number of schools in Kolkata and other districts in the third week of December 2012 where students held teachers and school administrators hostage, in order to force them to send them to Board examinations regardless of whether they have passed the screening test or not, marks the beginning of an ominous trend in West Bengal. The agitation was supported from outside by student politicians for narrow political gains<sup>23</sup>. Unless this trend is nipped in the bud, education in West Bengal, already in doldrums, will further decline.

Thus we find that, while the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda was celebrated with gusto throughout the length and breadth of the country, education in India is in doldrums. we are still far removed from Vivekananda's ideal of *man-making education*.

### ***III. Women in Contemporary India***

Vivekananda had a very conservative vision of the Indian woman, comparing her to Sita and Savitri. He, however, laid great emphasis on giving women their due honour. "*All nations on earth have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti*" (Vivekananda S. , 1982, p. 26).How far has Indian society acted on his words?

The Indian woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is far removed from the ideal of womanhood preached by Vivekananda. They not merely hold up half the Indian sky. The sky is the limit to their ambitions. In his Convocation Address to Banasthali University on March20, 2013, N. R. Narayan Murthy, founder and Emeritus Chairman, Infosys, rightly observed: "Historically, Indian women have always played an important role in the public space". (Murthy, 2013, p. 16) Women have progressed a lot since the days of Vivekananda They are no longer confined to the *Antappur* (inner walls of the women's quarters). India was one of the first countries of the world to have a lady as a Prime Minister, in Ms. Indira Gandhi and till recently, we had our first female President in Ms. Pratibha Patil. Many

others have governed Indian states, played an important role in the armed forces, bureaucracy, police, management, politics, and social work.

Indian women sportspersons have enhanced the glory of India by winning medals in the London Olympics (2012). As one correspondent aptly observed:

But thanks to Saina, and Geeta, Krishna and Mary, many girls in India may prefer sneakers to stilettos, muscles to mascara, and amateur sports clubs of all hues might mushroom in small town India just as beauty parlours did a decade or two ago. Forget gold, silver, bronze. They have given us a medal called hope<sup>24</sup>.

Indian women now lend glamour to many sporting events. (Chatterjee, 2012) Again, talented Indian women have been honoured abroad. Sharmila Tagore, an Indian film star of yesteryears, was conferred D.Litt (Honoris Causa) by Edinburg 's Napier University for her "outstanding contribution to world cinema".<sup>25</sup> In USA, Indian women, like Kalpana Chawla, and Indian origin women, like Sunita Williams have become astronauts and worked in NASA sponsored space programmes. So the sky is the limit for them. Education of women in India has contributed to women's empowerment. Special academic courses devoted to *Women's Studies* have been functioning in Indian universities like Jadavpur University and The University of Burdwan.

### ***Women are still second sex***

But Indians in general still hold a hypocritical attitude to Indian women. On the one hand Hindus are known to worship the Divine Mother. But, in 21<sup>st</sup> century India, *women are still the second sex*. They are not only *unwanted*. They are *made to feel unwanted* by giving them appropriate names. (Ghosh, 2011) The experience of the speakers in the recent *Jat Mahila Sammelan* amply show how difficult it is for an Indian woman achieve a level playing field with men.<sup>26</sup>

Female infanticide was a major social problem, even in the mid-eighties of the last century (Venkatramani, 1986). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, modern medical detection techniques, like amniocentesis, are misused to detect the sex of the unborn and abort female fetuses. As a result, the sex ratio declined from 957 per 100 live births in 2001 to 950 in 2011 (Ghosh, 2011) As a result, there is shortage of eligible brides in some areas of the country. Ahlawat's research focuses on the link between female foeticide and marriage migration in Haryana. (Ahlawat, 2012.).

Denigration of Indian women in films has been continuing for a long time. Film maker, Mahesh Bhatt, observed, "*The female form has been used by film makers since the dawn of cinema to gratify carnal appetites*. Most of our movies are designed not to awaken the masses to the grim realities of the world, but to narcotize and numb them with illusions. But now it is time to reflect."<sup>27</sup> Aiyar agrees with him. (Aiyar, 2013).

### ***Crimes against Women***

Crimes against women in India have risen by 23.4% in the last four years<sup>28</sup>. Studies done on rapes, (Mukherjee, 2005), honour killings (Verma, 2012) and immoral trafficking (Chaudhury P., 2012.) (Ghosh B, 2008) show that these forms of crime have become established social facts. Incidence of marital violence, rape, molestation and trafficking are regularly reported in the Press. In 2011 alone 2, 28,000 cases of atrocities on women have been recorded<sup>29</sup>.

### ***Rage against rape in Delhi***

*The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1995) defines rape as - "*The act of forcing a woman to have sex against her will*". Rape is not only brings physical trauma and social humiliation to the woman. As recent examples show, her very life may be endangered, because there has now emerged a tendency to kill the victim. Mrinal Satish found that there is a sharp rural-urban divide in India as far as rape is concerned. 75% of the rape cases that led to conviction in the last 25 years were from rural India. This finding from his Ph.D. research contradicts the statement of RSS chief Mohan Bhagawat that rape is only an urban phenomenon<sup>30</sup>. Delhi has truly become the *rape capital of India*. The rate of rape in Delhi is 7.2 per lakh while in Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh it is 6.2, 5.4 and 2.5<sup>31</sup>. Google Trends revealed that in 2012, New Delhi topped the list worldwide in searches for 'porn'<sup>32</sup>. Is there any link between viewing pornography and rape as has been claimed in a PIL in the Supreme Court.?

The gang rape and murder of a young woman and the equally savage assault on her male companion, to whom she was betrothed, in a Delhi bus on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2012, has again shown how dangerous the national capital has become for women<sup>33</sup>. The Delhi gang rape sparked a national outrage. For the first time in many months the incident united the Indian Parliament with Parliamentarians like Jaya Bacchan, Najma Heptullah, V.Maitreya, calling for *death sentence* to be passed on the rapists<sup>34</sup>. Indignant school, college and university students invaded Rashtrapati

Bhavan on Raisina Hill to protest the brutality. They laid siege to Raisina Hill, the North Block and the South Block which are the key centres of power in India. The agitators pointed out to the President that a rape occurs every 22 minutes<sup>35</sup>. They wanted justice. As *The Telegraph*, in an editorial rightly noted "*What is significant is that the protest is utterly spontaneous and leaderless*"<sup>36</sup>. The protests against the rape forced the government to constitute the Verma Panel to suggest reforms of laws relating to crimes against women. Of the 70,000 letters and emails, a sizeable number of letters came from rape victims themselves. The most important problems highlighted by them related to 1) lack of any initiative on part of police, including reluctance to file an FIR, 2) absence of any rehabilitation scheme for rape victims and 3) the social stigma they face<sup>37</sup>. "A majority of the emails raise the question of *why* it is generally the victim and not the rapist who faces social stigma" said a source<sup>38</sup>.

### ***Crimes against women: The case of West Bengal***

If Delhi is the 'rape capital', other states are not far behind. West Bengal, has topped the list of states as far as crimes against women are concerned. 12.7% of the 2, 28,000 cases of atrocities committed on Indian women in the year 2011-12, were committed in West Bengal. West Bengal also comes second to Madhya Pradesh as far as rape is concerned<sup>39</sup>. In 2012-13 too, West Bengal remains at the top.<sup>40</sup> But the government is being accused of doing precious little to improve the situation<sup>41</sup>. It is only trying to refute the figures published by the National Crime Records Bureau. The insecurity of women in West Bengal can be at least partly explained by the dysfunctional policing.

The Governor of West Bengal, M. K. Narayanan, in a recent report to the Centre, is reported to have written:

Years of non-involvement in genuine law and order cases has sapped the vitals of the force to a very large extent.

Absence of will together with pusillanimous attitude of lower level police is encouraging anti-social elements to carry on in this fashion.<sup>42</sup>

But the police are not the only ones to blame. Political leaders are equally to be blamed for this state of affairs in West Bengal.

But the people of West Bengal are no longer willing to put up with political and administrative apathy. The brutal rape-cum murders of girls, one at

Kamduni, near Barasat (8<sup>th</sup> June, 2013) and the other at Krishnaganj, near Nadia (12 June, 2013) have shaken the public conscience. Angry villagers of Kamduni have organized a mass movement to demand punishment for the killers. Their movement is totally apolitical. They have rejected all forms of help from the government<sup>43</sup>. And, the recent mass mobilization of civil society in Kolkata *sans* any political colour, on the issue of women's safety, has sent a strong message to politicians, especially of the ruling party, that people will not tolerate crimes against women.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Issue of women's safety ignored by representatives of the people***

In general, there is a tendency within the ruling establishment to ignore the issue of women's safety. Parliamentarian Hasmirat Kaur Badal alleged in an article that her notice under Rule 193 on December 19, 2012 asking the government what concrete measures have been taken by the home minister in curbing violence against women was not even admitted in Parliament. (Badal, 2012, p. 9) In West Bengal, lady MLAs regularly make insensitive statements regarding rape. Commenting on the Park Street rape case, (January 2012) the MLA from Barasat, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar allegedly claimed in front of an all India TV news channel that no rape happened at Park Street. It just a quarrel between the woman and her customers,. In this manner she not only denied the truth but distorted it. This stirred a controversy, following which she was warned by her party Trinamul Congress not to indulge in such loose talk<sup>45</sup>. A report claimed that the prime accused in the Park Street rape case is hiding in his aunt's house in Bangladesh while the government is least interested in bringing him to justice<sup>46</sup>. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, during her recent visit to the family of a rape –cum–murder victim's family at Kamduni village, allegedly refused to listen to the villagers who wanted to talk to her. Instead, she tried to give a political colour to their agitation<sup>47</sup>. Such an attitude on part of our rulers only emboldens potential rapists to commit crimes, knowing full well that they will not be caught.

### ***Women: Victims of Domestic Violence***

Vivekananda argued in favour of giving women their due honour. But the treatment meted out to a woman in her home by her husband and in-laws makes mockery of his teaching. Domestic violence in several forms has assumed the character of a pandemic in modern India.

The British government defined domestic violence as:

Any violence between current or former partners in an intimate relationship, wherever and whenever the violence occurs. The violence may include physical, sexual, emotional or financial abuse<sup>48</sup>.

This definition should be expanded in India to include violence by in laws. Honour killings, dowry deaths, etc. should form part of the definition.

### ***Honour Killing***

Honour killing is a form of atrocity that has emerged in recent times. The term first gained currency in 1929.

As defined by UNICEF

'Honor killing' is an ancient practice in which men kill female relatives in the name of family 'honor' for forced or suspected sexual activity outside marriage, even when they have been victims of rape. Reports indicate that offenders are often under 18 and that in their communities they are sometimes treated as heroes. These killings have been reported in Pakistan, Jordan, Yemen, Lebanon, Egypt, the Gaza strip and West Bank<sup>49</sup>.

But the UNICEF omitted India from this definition. Yet many honour killings take place on a regular basis in India itself. Verma (2012) found that incidence of honour killings in Haryana are found mostly in areas where the *khap* is active.

But West Bengal is not lagging behind. The first honour killing occurred recently, in a village of West Bengal.

A milk trader in Nadia hacked his daughter to death on the road near his home on finding her in the house of a youth with whom she was allegedly in a relationship.

Police said that the 18 year old girl was pinned to the ground by her brother and uncle and while her father hacked her with a sickle, the incident taking place in front of at least 50 villagers of Nakashipara<sup>50</sup>.



### ***Domestic Violence: The Case of Jharkhand***

And then there is the daily dose of violence most women have to encounter at home. An ASI of women's police station in Ranchi, Siberia Surin, told a reporter of *Times of India*: "Cases of domestic violence are the most common kind of complaints that come to us." Since 2009, the Jharkhand State Women's Commission has received more than 1000 cases of domestic violence out of which 247 are directly related to dowry. Since January 2009 till date as many as 328 cases of dowry deaths have been reported in Jharkhand<sup>51</sup>.

### ***Domestic Violence and Insurgency: The Case of Assam***

Domestic violence in Assam is leading a new trend. Women are leaving their families to join insurgents. In February 2012, Jahnabi Mahanta Rajkhowa, writer and teacher, left her husband and children to join the ULFA. Rinabala Ray, who lived in Koar village of Kokrajhar has left to join the ULFA. In both the cases, the women were educated and they blamed their husbands for such a decision Police are worried about souring family relationships turning housewives into insurgents.

Thus, though Indian women have progressed a lot since the time of Vivekananda, they still continue to be the second sex in an essentially male dominated society. It seems to me that the male psyche abhors independent spirited women. Any woman who moves about independently has to daily face some sort of harassment or violence. No wonder eve teasing, rape, sexual harassment in the etc. are increasing daily. A woman is not safe even in her home, as the growing incidence of dowry deaths, honour killings, incest and other forms of domestic violence will testify. So, women's empowerment remains a far cry in 21<sup>st</sup> century India.

### ***IV. Caste in Contemporary India***

The caste system, as Desai (Desai, 1984, p. 243) pointed out, was the 'steel frame' of Hinduism. The most pernicious aspect of caste, which Vivekananda mentioned, was *untouchability*. Untouchability, as Desai defined it, is the *segregation of a section of Hindus as untouchables who were precluded from such elementary rights as the right of entry to public temples, or the use of public wells or tanks, and the physical touch of whom contaminated a member of the higher caste*. (Desai, 1984, p. 263) But in 1950, with the promulgation of the new *Constitution of India*, the

untouchables won a major victory when untouchability was abolished. Article 17 of *The Constitution of India* stated:

“Untouchability” is abolished and its practice in any form is forbidden. The enforcement of any disability is arising out of “Untouchability” shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law.

Though Vivekananda forecast the rise of the *Shudras* in modern India, it was B.R. Ambedkar among other national leaders, who actually succeeded in translating Vivekananda's lofty ideals into concrete reality.

The Indian Constitution has provided for reservation for lower castes. Vivekananda had earlier argued in favour of helping those people who have been kept backward for centuries. But, I think that the reservation policy adopted in the Indian Constitution was due partially to Ambedkar's agitation. In his Presidential Address to the All India Depressed Classes Federation, Ambedkar stated, “*We should demand a certain percentage in the public service to be reserved for the Depressed Classes...*” (Ambedkar, 2010, p. 14) (Italics author's). It was a just demand. That demand was finally met when the new Constitution was inaugurated in 1950. Article 16(4) of *The Constitution of India*, prov

But the government's policy, times without number, was met with stiff resistance by upper castes. For example, the anti-reservation agitation of 2006 was one such agitation which virtually divided the Indian society into pro and anti reservationists. (Banerjee, 2008, pp. 59-90) But caste conflict has assumed endemic proportions in India and one of the reasons is the advancement of the lower castes. Haryana may be cited as an example<sup>52</sup>.

Since Independence, the Bahujans, as the Depressed classes call themselves, have tasted political power in states like Uttar Pradesh. But the lot of the Depressed Classes remain unchanged in many ways. Mohapatra (Mohapatra, 2012, p. 480) found that the vast majority of the Dalits remain backward educationally, and therefore, continue to suffer from multiple ignominies, including violence in the hands of caste minded people. Indira (Indira, 2012, p. 475) studied the social exclusion faced by manual scavengers. Education does not improve the situation as Dalit lady teachers have found: (Tandon, 2012).

## ***V. Democracy In India***

After she attained Independence in 1947 and adopted the world's longest constitution in 1950, India became the world's largest democracy. Unlike

the experience of other countries in South Asia, like Pakistan, Bangladesh or Myanmar, India has had a continuous tradition of democracy. Regular elections are held and people are free to change governments. The only time when democracy was threatened was during the Emergency (1975-77). But the 'ballot box' revolution of 1977 ensured victory of people's power. But the 'freedom' Vivekananda saw in the West was both *social* and *political* freedom. In case of India, people enjoy *political* freedom, but their lives in both rural and urban areas are hedged in with numerous restrictions, especially in the area of marriage. So, in most cases, *social* freedom is denied to them. In 21<sup>st</sup> century India, it is now possible to use the 'Right to Information Act' to monitor the activities of public functionaries and haul them up for corrupt practices. This is how Trilochan Sastry of "Election Watch" is using this law to get information on public functionaries and educate the people on whom to vote. (Balasubramaniam, 2013, pp. 30-32). But, these activists are under attack from vested interests. Thus N. Srinivasa Rao, an RTI activist in Andhra Pradesh was injected with poison on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2012 at Markapuram. His 'crime' was to seek information about the activities of the police.<sup>53</sup>

Vivekananda disliked the western politicians, whom he termed 'Shylocks'. Our political leaders are no better. MPs blatantly misuse power. Girish Kumar Sangvi, a member of Parliament, demolished and rebuilt a government bungalow allotted to him in flagrant violation of Lutyens Building Zone regulations.<sup>54</sup> In West Bengal, it has been alleged that it is possible to bribe political leaders and get away with any illegal activity.<sup>55</sup> When the whole of India was seething with anger about the Delhi rape case, a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Assam, Vikram Singh Brahma, was caught in the act of attempting to rape the wife of his host<sup>56</sup>.

But there is reason to hope that all is not lost. The Delhi gang rape has led to the rise of the social media and a new form of democratic mobilization of the masses which the politicians are watching with unease<sup>57</sup>. But amidst all the discussion of providing safety to women and women's empowerment, the *Women's Bill* for providing reservation to women in Parliament has again been placed in the cold storage.

## ***VI. Socialism In India***

Chakrabarty (Chakrabarty, 2011, p. 108) regarded Vivekananda's concept of socialism as a negative one. At the same time he viewed it in light of Vivekananda's view that individual freedom ought to be strengthened and extended. But I think that Vivekananda's concept of socialism is very vague. Independent India had embraced socialism of the Nehruvian variety.

Despite the onset of globalization, Nehru's model has not been fully discarded as is evident from the following facts.

1. Thanks to remote sensing techniques pioneered by Indian Space Research organization, fishing in India has become more scientific. (Das, 2013)
2. Drip irrigation techniques used in agriculture in Rajasthan has not only enabled substantial saving of water, but also reduced greenhouse gases. (Madhavan, 2013, p. 22)
3. The Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee programme has benefited millions of poor villagers.
4. A new cash transfer scheme for the poor Indian began from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2013. In an editorial entitled "Biplaber janma" the *Ananda Bazaar Patrika* observed that this scheme enables, 1) direct transfer of the subsidy money to the beneficiaries through their bank account; 2) direct contact of the government with the intending beneficiaries, 3) less corruption because the scheme is based on the bio-metric Aadhar card<sup>58</sup>.

But, as Banerjee (Banerjee A. , 2008, pp. 62-63) rightly observed, socialism cannot be just limited to social welfare. It is also associated with *socialization*. Without socialist consciousness among the people, there cannot be a socialist society. Whatever may be the criterion of socialism, it is clear that the term "Socialist" in the Preamble of our constitution now carries no meaning at all.

## **Discussion**

If we look at the history of modern India, we find that India after Vivekananda has made enormous material progress. Vivekananda died in 1902. India then was a backward country, impoverished by colonial rule, and grappling with multiple social evils like untouchability, child marriage, etc... When, India became independent in 1947, Vivekananda's prophecy was fulfilled. But it was a truncated freedom, since two nations-India and Pakistan emerged from British India. The implementation of the two nation theory caused mass movement of people on both sides of the border and led to enormous human suffering. What is worse, we had four wars with Pakistan which led to enormous loss of life and property. Now, in the twenty-first century, new forces are at work to undermine the unity and integrity of India. In Kashmir, and the north-east, secessionist forces, like ULFA, are at work. Ultra-Left Maoists are ruling the roost in many states<sup>59</sup>.

Contemporary India is a nation full of contradictions. India is now a front ranker in scientific and technological research and its applications. India is now the third richest country in Asia and the fourth richest in the world. Our GDP is \$4060, 000,000,000. It is true that on the positive side, we have achieved self-sufficiency in many fields, including food grain production, in basic and heavy industries, like iron and steel. Our booming service sectors, especially the BPOs, are major foreign exchange earners. We have a burgeoning middle class which is oriented to western lifestyles. India's huge middle class makes it a lucrative market for the multinationals, like Wal-Mart. And that is why there was so much pressure from the western powers, especially USA, to open up India's market to foreign direct investment, in which they ultimately succeeded, thanks to our present day politicians whose politics of 'blow hot, blow cold' ultimately put India down the road to embrace FDI at the cost of the national interest'. Would Vivekananda have approved this new form of colonization of India?

Despite making considerable *material* progress, India is yet to make the desired *social progress*. In fact according to *The Economist :World wide Quality of Life Index*, India ranked a poor 73 out of 111 countries in 2005. The *United Nations Human Development Index* ranked India 119 out of 177 countries. (Banerjee A., 2012). When Vivekananda lived, India had many social problems like untouchability, child marriage, illiteracy, *kulinism*, etc. Thanks to progressive social legislation in Independent India, some of the earlier evils like *kulinism*, were removed, only to be replaced by newer evils like female foeticide, dowry

Twenty-first century India still remains a society of *graded inequality*. Caste and communal conflicts, regionalism and insurgency poison our lives. Identity politics has now caught the attention of social scientists. In his 'Valedictory Address' to the 38<sup>th</sup> All India Sociological Conference, (29<sup>th</sup> December, 2012) renowned Political Scientist, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, spoke of among other things of *identity politics* shaping modern day Indian society and polity<sup>61</sup>.

In 21<sup>st</sup> century India, *functional illiteracy* continues to remain a social fact to the eternal shame of the nation. It is clear that missions like *Sarva Siksha Abhijan* have failed. Evils like corporal punishment of students and sexual harassment of students by school teachers, cyber bullying of teachers by students (Sarkar, 2013, p. 10) ragging (Bandyopadhyay, 2013, pp. 30-34), etc. are found throughout the Indian education system. But the Government, by introducing *Prohibition of Unfair Practices in Schools Bill*, seeks to curb such malpractices in schools<sup>62</sup>. How far such a law serves to improve the state of school education remains to be seen.

## *Swami Vivekananda's Vision of India's Progress*

In 21<sup>st</sup> century India, new social movements are compelling governments to introduce new laws which, we hope, will lead to progressive social change. Thus, the Delhi gang rape, which led to widespread anger among Indian youth about the government's total failure to give women proper security has bred a new kind of social movement, led by young Indians, demanding security and justice for women. The new form of leaderless political mobilization has been made possible by net savvy Indians harnessing the social media. (Friedman, 2013) They forced the government to introduce stricter laws on sex crimes. The new *Criminal Law (Amendment) Bill-2013* was brought against the backdrop of the country-wide outrage over Delhi gang-rape case, and it will now be called the *Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013*<sup>63</sup>.

Democracy in India has overcome its teething problems and has matured over time. But problems remain. Apart from caste and communal politics, we see semi-fascist tendencies in states like West Bengal. This is evident in the violent run up to the Panchayat elections in contemporary West Bengal (2013). Here the Opposition candidates and their supporters claim to be constantly attacked by henchmen of the ruling party which has been accused of trying to win the elections by hook or by crook<sup>64</sup>. But the enthusiasm of the voters, witnessed in the first round of Panchayat elections, shows that democratic consciousness has struck strong roots in West Bengal, the home state of Swami Vivekananda.

As for socialism, India was *never* a socialist society. Nehru introduced a 'socialistic pattern of society' which is a euphemism for mixed economy topped by a welfare state. Since the nineties, under the pressure of IMF, this model has been all but abandoned in favour of neo-liberal policies. (Banerjee A. , 2012)

## **Concluding Remarks**

Swami Vivekananda was one of the great modern thinkers India has produced in the nineteenth century. Though he was a religious leader *per se*, religious discourses and writings on religion form only a part of his much faceted contribution to India's intellectual heritage. It is his social thought which draws us, sociologists, to study his works and find out for ourselves what type of thinker he was. His concept of India's progress was an idealist one. He laid great stress on spiritual progress. But what attracts me as a sociologist to Vivekananda is his critique of Indian society. His theory of progress has several aspects which are relevant in the twenty-first century. Vivekananda's ideas on women's progress, his theory of the rise of the

*shudras* in modern India, his concept of man-making education, marks him out as a *radical* thinker. We are only now realizing how important Vivekanand's ideas are for the development of a modern Indian society and polity. Though India has made spectacular material progress since Independence, we have a long way to go in order to achieve the desired human and social progress.

### ***Acknowledgement***

*I am indebted to many people for their help and support. The paper was initially presented in RC 15 of the 38<sup>th</sup> All India Sociological Conference. (27-29<sup>th</sup> December, 2012) I thank the members of RC for giving me a patient hearing I thank my students, Sri Anindya Datta, Ms. Bhaswati Ray, and Ms. Debjani Chakrabarty Som for their valuable help in providing certain references which I used in this article. Prof. Rajat Bhattacharya, Professor of Philosophy of The University of Burdwan, also helped me by providing some information which I used in this work. I am also thankful to Sri Papan Chatterjee of UNET for providing technical help in editing the work. I am also grateful to my teacher, Dr. Gayatri Bhattacharyya, Head of the Department of Sociology, Calcutta University for her advice and encouragement to publish this work.*

### ***Notes***

1. S.E. Waldo: "Introduction" to Swami Vivekananda: *Inspired Talks*, (n.d.) Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai, p.13.
2. Gautam Chakrabarty: "Pujo hoi jhuprite ghora sadhur chabir, cithiro" in *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, Kolkata, 20.1., 2012, p.1&7.
3. For example, Bharat Vidya Charch Kendra dedicated their Twelfth Annual Conference (February 12, 2012) to the theme, *Search for Vivekananda's Bharata: History, Society and Religion*. The University of Burdwan organized two seminars on Swami Vivekananda. On 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2012, a State Level seminar on Swami Vivekananda on 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2012. On 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2012, The University of Burdwan organized a National Seminar on Swami Vivekananda's teachings in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Burdwan University Alumni Association organized a seminar entitled "Swami Vivekananda Educationist & Philosopher" on 14<sup>th</sup> September at 12 Noon at the Burdwan University Auditorium in Golapbag, West Bengal. Council For Political Studies organized a one day seminar on "The Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's ideas in Our Time" on 22<sup>nd</sup> March, 2013.

*Swami Vivekananda's Vision of India's Progress*

4. See for example, *Swami Vivekananda :A Documentary*, Direction Pronoy Roy, Radhika Roy, An NDTV Presentation, c & p Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Golpark, Kolkata. It was originally released in connection with the Centenary Celebrations of Swami Vivekananda's participation in the 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago .It was digitized and re- released in commemoration of Swami Vivekananda's 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Recently, Tricolour Productions released a biopic .Entitled, *The Light: Swami Vivekananda*(2013), it was directed by Tutu Sinha .Music was scored by Nachiketa and Dr.Haricharan Verma.
5. For example, a book entitled *Vivekananda for You* , edited by Satyam Raychaudhury was recently released by the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Ms. Mamata Banerjee at a function in Kolkata on 24<sup>th</sup> November,2012(Vide: "Sardhasatabarshe boi prakash 'Vivekananda for You'" by Staff Reporter, *Sangbad Pratidin* , 25<sup>th</sup> November,2012, p.3.
6. For example, The University of Burdwan has taken a decision to build a "Vivekananda Advanced Research Centre for Value Education and Culture". The Burdwan University Court, in its Second Meeting (2012-13) dated 6th July 2012, approved the matter on which the Executive Council had earlier taken a decision. (Vide "Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Court held on 6th July 2012,at 2.00pm in the New Administrative Building at Rajbati, Burdwan", dated 21.9.12[Mimeo]).
7. Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, had started a countrywide political campaign to stage a comeback as Chief Minister of Gujarat and try for the Prime Minister's office with Vivekananda as his ideological weapon. His vehicle, *Vivekananda Rath* became a big crowd puller. His speeches are punctuated with quotes from Vivekananda. He is distributing t-shirts, bats and balls to children, all bearing Vivekananda's portrait. The authorities of Ramakrishna Mission, the order of monks founded by Swami Vivekananda, are indignant over the 'childish' character of the campaign. They argue that printing Vivekananda's pictures on bats and balls is not a proper way to show respect to the great saint and social reformer. [Jayanta Ghoshal, New Delhi: "Modir tane Vivekanando rajnitir anginae(Thanks to Modi, Vivekananda is now in the political arena) *Ananda Bazaar Patrika*, Kolkata, 11th October,2012(Front page ,first news)].
8. "NCPDR draws guideline to eliminate corporal punishment" *The Hindu*, March 5, 2012
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# **The Dynamics of Ethnicity and Politics: The Variegated Trajectories of the Lepchas in Sikkim and West Bengal**

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## **Introduction**

Ethnicity is one of the most complex and intriguing phenomena in the history of mankind, which till date commands our intellectual attention as well as our common understanding. It is a force, which binds and separates at the same time. "Though, the term ethnicity is recent, the sense of kinship, group solidarity and common culture to which it refers is as old as historical record" (Hutchinson and Smith 1996:3). It endows upon a particular group/community, an innate sense of identity and belonging, which in turn, controls and directs group activities. Usually a strong belief in a common ancestry, real or imagined, is invoked among the members, which results in a strong and binding cohesion.

If on the one hand, ethnicity binds together members of a particular community, on the other hand, by virtue of the same quality, it separates members of two or more ethnically different communities. "A strong- and exclusive- sense of belonging to one group can in many cases carry with it the perception of distance and divergence from other groups. Within group solidarity can help to feed between-group discords" (Sen 2006: 2).

The classic example of it in the Indian social scenario would be the age old and often manipulated rift between the members of the Hindu and Muslim ethnic communities. The members of both these communities have on many occasions mobilised on ethnic lines against each other. The infamous and unfortunate Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992 could be cited as an example.

Thus, ethnicity unifies and differentiates simultaneously. Its persistence requires identity maintenance and the differentiation of boundaries (Barth 1969).

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Looking at the world scenario, ethnicity took a centre stage again in the latter half of the twentieth century, as against the Liberals' predictions about its imminent dissolution. It was widely speculated and argued that with the advent of modernisation, the primordial ties of religion, ethnicity, and language would cease to have its former strong and unquestionable effect on humans. Societies would be bound together by trade and commerce. New improved modes of communications would be the new binding force and ethnicity as an entity would gradually disappear. This, however, did not happen. "In every continent and practically every state, ethnicity reappeared as a vital social and political force" (Smith 1981:12). N.Jayaram rightly observes, "The forces of globalisation, including the demise of statism, the information technology revolution and the transformation of capitalism, do not seem to have weakened communitarian identities" (Jayaram 2012:1).

Thus, ethnicity as an imperative mode of human association and organization deserves to be treated with an academic and intellectual seriousness.

Innumerable attempts have been registered to describe and understand ethnicity from various standpoints and perspectives by scholars and intellectuals alike. Ethnicity has most often been understood and examined in the light of its binding effect as well as its potential for conflict, though the relationship between ethnicity and conflict is not always necessary.

This paper seeks to examine the relationship between politics on the one hand and ethnicity on the other. Briefly, politics conceptually is understood as an institutionalised form of exercise of collective power invented to serve the society at large. It is a mechanism directed to analyse the problems of the society and to subsequently solve them.

To begin with, in most cases, it is by virtue of a real and shared ethnicity or a shared cultural individuality that ethnic groups/ movements claim a communal solidarity for the recognition of their political, social, economic demands. It can be said to be an "inbuilt mechanism" of the group/community, being harnessed by the members of the group itself.

In most such cases, the ethnic groups bring to the foreground their unique cultural element which asserts the contrast/difference which exists between them and the other communities, mainstream or other. On the basis of this asserted difference, they seek a better treatment from the various Governmental as well as other agencies.

Ethnicity here is understood as a common platform used by the members of a group for certain benefits that are to be derived from the State or other

agency and for realizing a certain nonmaterial goal such as an 'identity with dignity.' Indian history is replete with such instances, starting from the linguistic re-organization of the States, the contentious reservation debate continuing to the present day, and the spate of demands for separate States across the country, the demand for Telangana being the most recent to be mentioned, among others.

However, there are also instances where it is the State or the other power bodies which in an indirect but effective way influence and utilise the phenomena of ethnicity according to the needs of the changing times. Such cases also flood our Indian history! Instances whereby political vote banks are secured on ethnic grounds, inciting of bloody ethnic clashes and conflicts, are galore. It is a reason why T. Nongbri (2003) warns against such political use of ethnic identity in erecting and maintaining boundaries among different groups.

Whatever might be the dynamics of relation between the two phenomena, the resulting implications do affect the social fabric of any society and they need to be explored in detail. Linking of the two concepts of 'politics' and 'ethnicity' dates back to Weber who suggested that the belief in a common ancestry is likely to be a consequence of collective political action rather than its cause; people come to see themselves as belonging together-coming from a common background- as a consequence of acting together (Jenkins 2008: 10). Abner Cohen even goes to the extent of stating that ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon (Cohen, 1969). One can actually find a gamut of varied literature on politics and ethnicity.

This paper, however, aims to draw everyone's attention to a particular ethnic group that has struggled to withstand the tests of cruel times and circumstances with resilience to maintain and carry forward their millennia old culture and traditions in the face of the most adverse conditions. In other words, the paper will examine the meandering path trodden by the Lepchas in Sikkim as well as in the district of Darjeeling in West Bengal and the role of the State or States with regard to the concept of 'ethnicity' in both of the aforementioned areas. The resulting implications of the treatments meted out to the Lepchas by the 'States' will be explored in detail then.

The discussion/presentation has been divided into four sections. Section one deals with the historical background of the Lepchas and their local narratives which constitutes a discourse in itself. Section two deals with the series of hydel power projects and the resulting impact it has on the Lepchas in the State of Sikkim. Section three would bring to the forefront the ongoing struggle for the separate State of Gorkhaland, the resistance put



up by the State Government of West Bengal and the role of the Lepchas amidst all the turmoil. And, section four would suggest the tentative conclusion of the discussion.

### **Local Historical Narratives of the Lepchas**

The Lepcha tribal/ethnic group is a group which has been declared to be the Indigenous People (IP) in Darjeeling district of West Bengal State and the State of Sikkim in India. "Indigenous people are any ethnic/tribal group who inhabit a geographical region with which they have a long term historical connection, and have not moved to any other place. They are characterized by strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic and political systems: distinct language, culture and beliefs; resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive people and communities" (De, 2011).

The Lepchas believe that in the earlier days Sikkim and Darjeeling together constituted their 'Mayel Lyang' or their homeland. According to their local narratives, the Tibetans too started to settle in and around the area. Around 1420 A.D a 'Brotherhood Treaty' was signed between the two ethnic groups at the historic Kabi Langchok, situated in Sikkim. The years 1760-1835 witnessed the influx of other communities, mainly the Gorkhas and the Europeans into the Mayel Lyang as well. Prithvi Narayan Shah, the Hindu ruler of Nepal, in a quest to enlarge his Kingdom is believed to have sent expeditionary forces to Darjeeling as well as Sikkim. The Dukupas of Bhutan too have been believed to have attacked Mayel Lyang. The Lepchas thus assert that they had been from the very beginning under attack by numerous other ethnic communities.

Later, a treaty was signed between the ruler of Sikkim and the British in February 1835 which is also known as the DEED OF GRANT OF DARJEELING. As a result of this treaty, a part of Mayel Lyang (Darjeeling) went under the British administration. Though the Lepchas did develop in the realms of education, economy and religion under the new rule, scant attention was paid to the sustenance of their culture, language and traditions.

In the post independence period, i.e., when the British left India, Darjeeling was put under West Bengal. And, the kingdom of Sikkim having joined the Indian Union in 1975 marks another trajectory followed by this tribal community.

The Lepchas firmly believe that as a people, as if bereft of any agency, they had to go through the vicissitudes of history. Even in the last 66 years of Indian independence, little has been done for their overall development and sustenance and survival of their culture by the State powers.

### **Lepchas in Sikkim and the Hydel Power Projects**

Sikkim has three major ethnic groups. They are Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese, who form the dominant ethnic group. "In 1978, the Lepchas and the Bhutias were recognised as Scheduled Tribes and 12 seats were reserved in the Legislative Assembly to safeguard their political interests; quotas too were reserved for them in Government employment and educational institutions. These safeguards were justified in order to protect the interests of the Lepchas and the Bhutias who were rendered a political minority with the incorporation of Sikkim into India" (Arora 2006: 4065).

Moreover the Lepchas had also been provided with their own famous Lepcha reserve in Dzonghu, with a population of approximately 7,000 where they could follow their own tradition and customs in their pristine form. The reserve is closed to all outsiders sans the permission of the Sikkim Government. "Dzonghu is considered to be the last bastion of Lepcha tradition and culture; a site of ethnic purity" (Arora and Jayaram 2013: 144).

However, with the Central Government recognising the North East region of India (including Sikkim), as the 'future powerhouse', great has been the stake for the indigenous Lepcha community. The series of hydropower projects declared as driven by the idea of National interest and State development seemed to take back from this tribe what was ceremoniously given to them earlier.

"The drive to construct these hydropower projects was primarily pursued by the Central Government of India, until the slow process of liberalization of hydropower policies allowed the 'sub-national' state governments to invite private players into the sphere of dam building. Sikkim was the first of the states to spearhead the process in 2001-02, but the process in effect gathered pace from 2005" (Chowdhury and Kipgen 2013: 196).

There are currently twenty nine hydro-power projects at various stages of implementation in Sikkim. Five of these, planned for the Dzonghu reserve, have been the focal points for protests (Arora and Jayaram 2013: 143).

Sikkim's tryst with hydel power projects dates back to Rathongchu hydropower projects (1993-97), "when the Buddhist monks had vehemently protested against the project on the ground of defilement of their sacred landscapes" (Arora, 2008).

The current series of Hydropower projects planned on the famous river Teesta, launched in the year 2005-06 is believed to be nothing less than a direct assault on the culture of the Lepchas, not to forget the onslaught on the eco-system of the river basins. River Teesta is like a lifeline for the Lepchas and their culture/traditions. Many of their folktales revolve around this mighty river along with river Rangit. For the Lepchas, the implementation of the Teesta hydel project and the loss of Dzonghu (the ancient Lepcha reserve) may result in ethnocide, the disappearance of their cultural heritage.

Moreover, there was the unimaginable violation of the understanding and tacit agreement about securing the free prior and informed consent of the people themselves when the project took off, with the rightful participation in the decision making being blatantly denied to the Lepchas. For example, the public hearing conducted by the Sikkim Pollution Control Board on Teesta III at Chungtang is marked by inadequate studies and denial of information, procedural violations as in terms of issuing notice, false assurances, and issuance of threats, intimidations and false charges against the affected communities. (Yumnam 2012).

Apart from the obvious threat of 'cultural assassination' and the myriad of ecological threats such as the apprehended disappearance of the local flora and fauna, bigger problems of resettlement and rehabilitation of the displaced population come to the surface.

Atrocities committed by the State were bound to have repercussions, with the affected community protesting for their rights. The Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) is the rechristened name of the Joint Action Committee, an organisation formed by the people living in the basin of river Teesta in the northern district of Sikkim in 2005.

The indigenous Lepcha people, affected by Teesta III project had been staging a series of protests to protect their livelihood and the biodiversity of the region from devastation by the project. The Affected Peoples Association, the Affected Citizens of Teesta (ACT) have been struggling for people's livelihood and for protection of environmental sustainability. ACT has been making continuous efforts and has even filed cases in the Supreme Court of India to protect the natives and affected Citizens and their

environment from the harmful effects of construction of large power projects in the region.

“Affected citizens also issued a Legal Notice challenging the Public Hearing and seeking to declare it null and void. Despite this the projects are accorded environmental clearance by the Ministry of Environment and Forest” (Yumnam 2012).

Innumerable NGOs have also joined in to voice the concerns of this particular group.

However, it would be a mistake to ignore or negate the diverse reactions towards the hydel projects that exist among the Lepchas themselves. “There has emerged a strong support for the dams among many sections in Dzonghu who argue that the dam would be a way to save Lepcha culture from vanishing by ensuring that Dzonghu Lepchas had a future and did not all leave for the larger towns where they were more likely to lose their language and culture” (Arora and Jayaram 2013: 145).

The supporters of the hydro-power projects from within Dzonghu have been as active as ACT and other opponents, though drawing less attention from the media and scholars.(Arora and Jayaram 2013:150).

Despite all the commotion revolving around the hydro power projects, the State Government nonetheless seems to give green signals to more hydro power projects in Sikkim. “The double standards of the state government are revealed in the fact that while on one hand it has accorded primitive tribe status to the Lepchas of the state, on the other hand, it has plans to take away the very land and indigenous culture of the people it claims it is protecting” (Arora 2007: 3452).

Keeping the contention of the paper in mind, it can be stated that in the state of Sikkim, developmental projects were launched and are being pursued at the expense of the ethnic identity and interests of the Lepchas. Despite the state cancelling four out of the five dam projects as a result of the protests by the Lepchas and others, the very idea of the hydro power projects in Dzonghu questions the credibility of the Government with respect to the ethnic sentiments of the Lepchas all around the world. The negation of the ethnic identity of the Lepchas for material benefits by the state is thus evident.

## **Lepchas in Darjeeling**

Darjeeling has a meandering history of its own which has been shared with Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and British India, before finally getting amalgamated into West Bengal. At present it houses a number of ethnic communities.

Darjeeling has been embroiled in a bitter struggle for identity for a very long period, the most haunting being the agitation of 1984-86 for Gorkhaland, spearheaded by the GORKHA NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT (GNLF), under the leadership of Mr. Subhas Ghising. The creation of a Hill Council in 1988 however quietened the then struggle for a separate state. "Gorkhaland is the name given to the area in and around Darjeeling and the Duars in North West Bengal in India" (Rai, 2009: 278). The year 2007 again witnessed a resurgence of the demand under the leadership of Mr. Bimal Gurung and his party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha (GJMM). This resurgence assumed a form that was blown out proportion as the political scene in the hills and plains deteriorated steadily. In the cacophony of shrill demands and counter demands and the aftermath, the Lepchas had their own set of grievances directed not just to the State but also to their fellow hill populations.

With regard to the State, the Lepchas had always lamented the failure of the state to attend to their fifty year long demand of imparting primary education to their children in their own language. Several memorandums were served to the regional power blocks, which have the power to make recommendations to the State Government. However, nothing concrete came up. Indeed, it is quite a paradox to notice that the schools and colleges in the hills facilitate the learning of Nepali, Tibetan, English and Hindi languages but the language of the "original inhabitants", of the place, the Lepchas, has no room in the School/College curriculum.

This brings back to the memory the year 1956 when the Indian Constitution through article 350A recognised the need to facilitate the imparting of primary education to the children belonging to the Linguistic Minority Groups in their mother tongue, especially with regard to the linguistic minorities. Though, there is a ray of hope with the Lepcha Association privately running around 45 schools to impart and pass on the heritage of their language to the young generations.

Another contentious issue is the inclusion of the other tribes like the Tamangs and the Limboos in the list of Scheduled Tribes in the year 2002

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without any effort on the part of the State to make some additional provisions for the already existing Scheduled Tribes, who were now meant to struggle harder for the same limited number of seats already allotted to them. "It is like addition of deprivation to the already deprived," said a member of the Lepcha community.

There was another major controversy in the year 2009 which added fuel to the fire. It was with regard to the recruitment to the EFR, the State Paramilitary Force. Prior to it, the Lepcha youth used to get enlisted in the Force. It offered them a stable means of living. However, in the year 2009 it was made mandatory for the young boys from Darjeeling and Sikkim to obtain the 'Gorkha' or 'Sikkimese' certificates accordingly for relaxation in height for the recruitment. Problem arose for the Lepcha youth from Darjeeling as they could not procure the 'Gorkha' certificate for the simple reason that they do not fall under the 'Gorkha' category. Six Lepcha boys were returned empty-handed on this pretext that year.

Here, one can unmistakably pinpoint the rampant ignorance on the part of the officials and policy makers of the complex ethnic and social fabric of the very place which they govern and administer. There is a complete lack of an in-depth understanding of the different ethnic relations which make up the hill society.

Another member of the Lepcha Association based in Kolkata asserted that the Lepchas in Darjeeling strongly felt that they were never given their rightful share in political and other kinds of available resources in the 22 years long reign of Subhas Ghising and his Council. There were also speculations of them being branded as 'Manipuri Lepchas' under his regime which the Lepchas strongly condemned. Here one cannot but notice the alienating effect which can be irreversibly caused within the psyche of the masses concerned if the 'ethnic' roots are not properly acknowledged and respected.

Though the Lepchas, Gorkhas and the other communities have lived together in a close physical as well as cultural proximity, and inter-marriages resulted in the 'sharing of blood', the above mentioned blatant ignorance and the resultant incitement of ethnic sentiments have proved to be harmful to the existing social fabric.

The Lepchas are also not at ease with the nomenclature 'Gorkhaland'. For them, this term does not do full justice and is in a way an assault to their claim of being the aboriginals of the region. The term 'Gorkha', though it is claimed to be an umbrella term for all the ethnic communities residing in

Darjeeling and the adjoining hill areas, is not however welcomed by the Lepchas who believe that the term should be changed to accommodate their distinct ethnic presence as well.

Moreover, the formation of the GORKHA TERRITORIAL ADMINISTRATION (GTA) in 2011 resulted as a tri-partite agreement between the Centre, the State and the GJMM. Though recently, the GJMM had rejected outright the GTA for some time, the Lepchas were always wary of it, since its very inception. They were disillusioned by the fact that out of the 21 seats in the GTA, there was not a single seat given to them. Even the 5 seats, the members of whom were to be nominated by the Governor, remained elusive for them.

The strategic move by the State Government, i.e. the Government of West Bengal in establishing a Lepcha Development Board in 2013 which promised not only to preserve the Lepcha customs and traditions but was also meant for their overall development, had far reaching effects in the political scenario of Darjeeling. Moreover, the step invoked different reactions.

Firstly, the ardent supporters of the Gorkhaland movement viewed this move by the State Government as divisive politics. For them, the state had utilised the Lepchas as a pawn for countering the restlessness in the hills over the demand for Gorkhaland. The ethnicity of the Lepchas, for them, was being celebrated by the State Government after years of ignoring their demands, at a time when the movement for Gorkhaland had seemed to reach its crescendo.

For the Lepchas, who welcomed the positive attention from the State were somewhat in an 'awkward' position, torn between the two extreme stands.

A Lepcha person asserted that the Lepchas did not stand against the movement for Gorkhaland. However, after years of being neglected, the situations had taken such a shape that they had to accept the attention of the State Government towards them especially from the year 2010 onwards. An environment of uneasiness, however, was created in the hills among the Lepchas and the non-Lepcha populations, bordering on mistrust.

The State Government, lastly, by establishing the Lepcha Development Board seemed to have taken the strategic step in an attempt to curb the mounting demand for Gorkhaland, so as to stop the further division of the State. It can even be stated that the step was a success for it reinstalled the faith of a section of the hill population in the State Government. Though

there is still more to be done to contain the unrest in the hills, the development of the Lepcha Development Board was an efficient move.

Thus, this strategic move did affect immensely the political and social scenario in the hills. The movement, did backtrack, but not without the creation of mistrust among the hill people and the furthering of antagonism in the hills.

Here, the relationship between ethnicity and politics takes on a multi-dimensional character. There are differing stands with regard to one political move and it somehow gives the individuals the freedom of choice as to which perspective he/she embraces.

## **Conclusion**

Following closely the path trodden by the Lepchas in both the States of Sikkim and West Bengal, one can decipher the potential the relationship of ethnicity and politics wields. The dynamics of their relationship, apart from its positive avenues, is characterized by a constant potential threat of one being misused by the other.

Thus it can be stated that this powerful relationship is from the very start not only armed with abundant positive prospects but also is ridden with unimaginable potential threats to the social fabric of any society.

A very clear understanding of the intricacies of ethnicity has to be gained in order to appreciate the role of politics in transforming or sustaining it. The same is applicable in the case of the character and functioning of politics. A proper and correct understanding will ensure the smooth functioning of any human civil society. Either of the two has to utilise the other's positive potential rather than spoiling their innate essence. Maybe, then and then only ethnicity and politics would unite more and divide less!

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## The Interface between Cinema and Society: The Construction of Cine-Reality

*Suvankar Dasgupta* \*\*

*"Although for some people cinema means something superficial and glamorous, it is something else. I think it is the mirror of the world."*<sup>1</sup>

- Jeanne Moreau

Cinema and society are mutually inclusive entities. As they say, cinema is the mirror of society. We might go a step further and proclaim that society is a mirror of cinema too. Skeptics rule out this possibility and put cinema in the leisure basket and proclaim that 'there can be little argument that feature films only rarely are addressed directly to contemporary social problems.'<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the optimists emphasize the authority and reach of cinema as the most powerful medium in a globalized world which has shrunk to next door proportions. Take for example a stern optimist of the medium-the Marxist leader Lenin. 'After the mass revolution in Soviet Russia, Lenin understood the potential of cinema & how wonderfully it can be used as tool for propaganda. As per directions from Lenin, the three young Turks who readily devoted themselves to the cause of Marxism through films were Russian filmmakers Eisenstein, Pudovkin & Dovjenco.'<sup>3</sup> In fact, the Hegelian dialectic was considered best displayed in film editing through the development of montage.

However, there has been much debate as to whether or not films influence our lives and if they do, to what extent? Ang Lee, director of "Brokeback Mountain,"-the Oscar winner film, which deals with homosexuality speaks of "the power of cinema to change the way we're thinking." One of the great directors of America, Steven Spielberg, has called some Oscar-nominated films of the past as "courageous" for the risks they took with stories about racism, terrorism, government, corporate crime, and homosexuality. But not everyone who thinks about the role of cinema in society is convinced of their ability to create lasting social change. The American actor, director Robert Redford expressed his doubt, saying: "I don't know how much films actually impact social movements. Fashion, perhaps."<sup>4</sup> Having known both sides of the argument on the nature of relationship between cinema and

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society, now let us proceed to analyze the interface between cinema and society or what is often termed as *cine-reality* in popular parlance.

Of all the art forms, cinema has the rare quality to depict the '*reality as it is*' albeit '*simulated reality*.' This might sound contrary to the layperson's notion of the interconnections between the 'reel' and the 'real.' In fact, if we conform to popular belief, that it is not unusual to equate 'unreal' with 'cinema' is evident from the fact that whenever people encounter a high in drama, rare and very unusual event in their life they cannot stop yelling- "just like cinema, right?" If society is embodiment of '*life*' then cinema most definitely personifies anything that is '*larger than life*.' It is true that sometimes even sociologists have a high-brow attitude towards cinema putting it in the basket of entertainment or a mere leisure time activity. 'Perhaps of all the areas of culture and society explored within the discipline of sociology, the topic of cinema has been less comprehensively served. Whilst there has been an ongoing exploration of the sociology of the mass media, more generally the study of cinema has been accorded sporadic attention.'<sup>5</sup> Mainstream sociology hardly analyzes *films as social facts* and deposit them often either in the baskets of literature or label them as leisure objects in the omnivorous bin of journalism and/or media especially in contemporary times. Sociological analysis of films is therefore a rare commodity in India. This article thus is a humble endeavour to bridge this gap with the primary objective of establishing the reflexive nature between cinema and society and thus understanding the true nature of cine-reality.

Cinema in its pure form is taken from life and generally depicts society in a very bona fide manner sometimes even through forms which may or may not appear real, like through ways such as magic realism, surrealism to more of such abstractions. More often than not we fail to understand the nature of cine-reality because we make the mistake of viewing reality as something '*given*'. Reality or the perception of reality can never be a static concept. Rather it varies from one individual to the other depending on their socio-economic, socio-cultural standpoint. Also, the nature of cine-reality is related to our emotional states and cognitive schema at the time of watching the film. 'When our emotions get entangled with what we see in cinema, it gets real. Root of all misunderstandings of *cinematic realism* rests on this ground. Realism in cinema does not depend on what is portrayed on screen but rather on audiences' imagination on the collective experience of realistic feeling that he or she gathers from the film. Audiences realize cine-reality when they are receptive towards their own feelings and realizations. That holistic reality is the construction of an audience and of the filmmaker per se.'<sup>6</sup> In the words of the master filmmaker Satyajit Ray, 'cinema combines the cold logic of science with the subtlest abstraction of human

imagination.’<sup>7</sup> Cine-reality thus is a social construction, a complex whole of objectivity and subjectivity and a judicious mix of art and science to depict human life and social problems alike.

In order to understand the ways and means by which cinema acquires meaning and tries to convey a coherent message to the audience via any form, we have to have a comprehensive grasp over the language of cinema, semiotics: which comes largely under film language itself and to some extent film theories. This is not to say that one cannot appreciate a film without knowing its language and some of its theories. But that would be a naïve, layperson’s appreciation who is a *film illiterate* and possibly unaware of the subtle realities portrayed in cinema and the ways in which cinema defines the contours of our realities. I reiterate here, when we consider a film as a text, it can be read almost like a book provided one is well versed with the language. In order to decipher the language then we have to know its grammar which is what *film grammar* precisely is all about.

*‘Film is a language used to tell stories, and the narrator of those stories is the camera. Yes, the director is the ultimate storyteller, but the “voice” he/she will use is that of the camera.’*<sup>8</sup> It is concurred that ‘like the language of words and the language of music, film language too has its grammar, syntax and punctuation; its short sentences and its long ones; its pause and rhetoric and emphasis. The specific usages of camera & editing which gives rise to film language were mostly discovered by the American director D. W. Griffith. Like speech, shot also possesses a language – a language of images, a language of visuals. Likewise, as in literature the story is divided into paragraphs & chapters, the story of cinema can also be divided by some mechanical & chemical techniques such as ‘mix’ and ‘fade’. Griffith also successfully implemented the techniques by which the changing camera perspectives give rise to close-up, mid shot, long shot & also the successful implementation of such shots in films.’<sup>9</sup>

It is only recently that there has been any contact between *semiology* & the study of film, despite the fact that there is a widespread idea that that cinema in some way is a language, or at least has a grammar.<sup>10</sup> Semiotics, in short can be said to be the science of signs. A sign can be a word, a sound, or a visual image. Saussure divides a sign into two components--the *signifier* (the sound, image, or word) and the *signified*, which is the concept the signifier represents, or the meaning. As Berger points out, the problem of meaning arises from the fact that the relation between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and conventional. In other words, signs can mean anything we agree that they mean, and they can mean different things to different people.<sup>11</sup> Christian Metz was one of the giants of French film

theory, which became best known for the use of semiology as a method to analyze cinema. In *Film Language* (1968), Metz argued that cinema is structured like a language. Adopting Saussure's models, Metz made the distinction between "langue," a language system, and "language," a less clearly defined system of recognizable conventions. Metz contends that film cannot be regarded as comprising a "langue," in the sense of having a strict grammar and syntax equivalent to that of the written or spoken word. Unlike the written word, film's basic unit, which Metz argues is the shot, is neither symbolic nor arbitrary but iconic; therefore, it is laden with specific meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Now a quick word on film theory, the final component which is necessary to grapple with the meaning conveyed in a film. The root meaning of the word 'theory' is to look at. A theory is a look at something. Hence a *film theory* can thus help us in gaining knowledge of and about films. It is striking that more great filmmakers have a well-worked out theory. Some of them are even full fledged theoreticians.<sup>13</sup> There are several film theories like *Marxist film theory*, *Feminist film theory*, *Structural film theory*, *Psychoanalytical film theory*. In analyzing the role of film theory in understanding the interface between films and society let us now discuss one of Laura Mulvey's (the feminist film theorist) concept, in the realm of *Visual-Spectatrix* which is best exemplified in her essay '*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*', first published in *Screen* in Autumn 1975, collected in book form in 1989 and long a staple of anthologies of film theory. Mulvey presents a pessimistic, even morbid account of the female spectator's place as it is constructed by mainstream narrative cinema. She considers the interaction in film of three kinds of 'look': the camera's look at characters in the diegesis (narrative), the characters' look at each other and finally, the spectator's look at the screen. Although she indicates that these variously sited gazes exist in a state of 'shifting tensions.' Her essay also suggests that, for male subjects at least, they may be continuous or homogeneous. Thus a male character in the diegesis prompts a camera movement by gazing in a desiring manner towards a female. Where the male character in mainstream film exemplifies activity and controls the operation of looking, the on-screen woman can only connote '*to-be-looked-at-ness*'<sup>14</sup> The male gaze, a widespread phenomenon of the patriarchal position in our society manifests itself in cinema and thereby creates a cine-reality which Mulvey points out so vividly in her pioneering theory. Herein lay the significance of implementing a film theory to understand specific cine-reality.

Any attempt to understand the interface between cinema and society would be incomplete if we try to look at it ahistorically. Therefore, an

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understanding of the cine-reality also entails a prior knowledge of the film movements which happened across the various parts of the world in an attempt to make cinema more real, more lifelike overcoming some inherent stumbling blocks of cinema such as the 'larger than life' scale and the 'enactment or the simulation of reality' aspect, which almost always turns cinema into a medium which at best can be magical, entertaining and relaxing but never real in the popular parlance. The film as we know today are influenced, strengthened and matured as a result of these movements. Two such movements are discussed in brief, namely, *Italian neo-realism* and *French new wave* to pave a better understanding of our *Indian parallel cinema* in general and cine-reality in particular.

*Italian neo-realism:* Even before the French New Wave, Italian neo-realism staked out new cinematic territory. Screenwriter and poet Cesare Zavattini wrote an actual manifesto to guide these films unquestionably; their greatest single influence was the anti-Fascism that marked World War II's immediate postwar period. Key elements are an emphasis on real lives (close to but not quite documentary style), an entirely or largely non-professional cast, and a focus on collectivity rather than the individual. Solidarity is important, along with an implicit criticism of the status quo. Plot and story come about organically from these episodes and often turn on quite tiny moments. Cinematically, neo-realism pushed filmmakers out of the studio and on to the streets, the camera freed-up and more vernacular, and the emphasis away from fantasy and towards reality. Despite the rather short run - 1943 to 1952 - the heavyweight films of the period and the principles that guided them put Italian cinema on the map at the time and continue to shape contemporary global filmmaking.<sup>15</sup>

So what is neo-realism? André Bazin called it a cinema of "fact" and "reconstituted reportage," Cesare Zavattini, who functions as a kind of godfather of the movement, stated: "This powerful desire of the [neo-realist] cinema to see and to analyze, this hunger for reality, for truth, is a kind of concrete homage to other people, that is, to all who exist." The neo-realists "respected" the entirety of the reality they filmed. This meant occasionally showing scenes in real-time and always resisting the temptation to manipulate by editing. Scenes are shot on location, with no professional extras and often a largely unprofessional cast. Set in rural areas or working-class neighborhoods, the stories focus on everyday people, often children, with an emphasis on the unexceptional routines of ordinary life. The aim, method and philosophy were fundamentally humanist: to show Italian life without embellishment and without artifice. As director Giuseppe Bertolucci noted: "*The cinema was born with neo-realism.*"<sup>16</sup>

Italian neo-realist movement owes a great deal to the French filmmaker Renoir. The key filmmakers of the movement were- Vittorio de Sica (with his classic *Ladri di biciclette* or *Bicycle Thieves*, 1948) Roberto Rossellini (*Roma: città aperta* or *Open City*, 1946), Federico Fellini, Luchino Visconti (*Obsessione* or *Obsession*, 1942) and Michelangelo Antonioni. 'Bicycle thieves' was one of the first films in the history of cinema which incorporated the story of a common man and his apparent class struggle much in line with the Marxian concept of class struggle. Hence for cinema it was a transition from being an elitist preoccupation to a common man's medium, probably for the first time.

*French new wave:* An artistic movement whose influence on film has been as profound and enduring as that of surrealism or cubism on painting, the French New Wave (or *Le Nouvelle Vague*) made its first splashes as a movement shot through with youthful exuberance and a brisk reinvigoration of the filmmaking process. Most agree that the French New Wave was at its peak between 1958 and 1964, but it continued to ripple on afterwards, with many of the tendencies and styles introduced by the movement still in practice today. Immediately after World War II, France, like most of the rest of Europe, was in a major state of flux and upheaval; in film, it was a period of great transition. After the traumatic experience of war, a generation gap of sorts emerged between the more "old school" French classic filmmakers and a younger generation who set out to do things differently.<sup>17</sup> French New Wave cinemas talked about the cinema of awareness for the first time almost rejecting the *cinema of illusion*.<sup>18</sup>

In the 50s, a collective of intellectual French film critics, led by André Bazin and Jacques Donia-Valcroze, formed the groundbreaking journal of film criticism *Cahiers du Cinema*. *Cahiers* had two guiding principles:

- 1) A rejection of classical montage-style filmmaking (favored by studios up to that time) in favor of: *mise-en-scene*, or, literally, "placing in the scene" (favoring the reality of what is filmed over manipulation via editing), the long take, and deep composition; and
- 2) A conviction that the best films are a personal artistic expression and should bear a stamp of personal authorship, much as great works of literature bear the stamp of the writer. This latter tenet would be dubbed by American film critic Andrew Sarris the "*auteur* (author) theory."

Out of all this came a group of conventions that were consistently used in the majority of French New Wave films, including:

- Jump cuts: a non-naturalistic edit, usually a section of a continuous shot that is removed unexpectedly, illogically.
- shooting on location

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- Natural lighting
- Improvised dialogue and plotting
- Direct sound recording
- Long takes

Many of these conventions are commonplace today, but back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, this was all very groundbreaking.<sup>19</sup> The depiction of *reality as it is* started with Italian neo-realism and French New Wave. The fact that cinema can personify the wider problems of society, common man's plight, life as it is in a non-obtrusive and matter of fact manner was paved primarily by these two movements and hence people for the first time in the history of cinema started taking the medium seriously- layperson and academicians alike-in an endeavor to realize the interface between cinema and society which will eventually culminate in having film studies as a major subject in the academics, various other film and cine-club movements in different parts of the world and a general awareness about films to expand the horizon of the medium.

Some point to Claude Chabrol's *Le beau Serge* (1958) as the first feature success of the New wave. But it was in 1959 with François Truffaut's first feature, *Les quatre cents coups*, or *The 400 Blows*.<sup>19</sup> Another significant name of French new wave was Jean-Luk Godard, a politically active radical filmmaker whose most cited film *Breathless (A bout de souffle)*, stunned the world.

*Indian parallel cinema:* Parallel cinema movement propelled a kind of cinema which can be termed as '*Art house cinema*', chiefly depicting our day to day concerns or, social issues routed in 'realism'. 'New Indian cinema of the 50's, 60's and 70's is where the parallel cinema movement can be traced. The pioneering figures of this movement were from Bengal – Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak, Mrinal Sen or, Tapan Sinha.'<sup>20</sup> The Indian parallel cinema heralded its journey by Ray's *Pather Panchali* (The song of the road, 1956) who confessed that he dreamt of making a film only after watching *Bicycle Thieves*, a very significant film of the Italian neo-realist movement. No wonder *Pather Panchali* was a pioneering film which exhibited many firsts. For the first time in Indian cinema a complete realistic account of rural India took place. The film was shot in real locations, with both actors and non-actors, with little or no make-up, life like dialogues and use of natural light as far as possible thereby producing a slice of life and a cine-reality much in the line of Italian neo-realism. The other name given to this movement was *Indian New Wave* following the French New Wave or *Nouvelle Vague* which on the contrary is believed to have started with Mrinal Sen's *Bhuvan Shome* and Mani Kaul's *Uski Roti* in



1969.<sup>21</sup> There is no ubiquitous agreement on the same. Nevertheless, the flow of realism in cinema which started from the 1950's produced a great number of directors who were dedicated to capture the social realities and problems *as it is*, with no fabrication of any sorts. 'Directors such as Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihlani, Adoor Gopalakrishnan among others contributed, strengthened and extended this kind of cinema.'<sup>22</sup> Directors such as Mani Ratnam, Amol Palekar, Goutam Ghosh, Budhadeb Dasgupta, Aparna Sen, Rituparna Ghosh, Dibakar Banerjee and Anurag Kashyap traded the same path in current times.

The crisis of realistic cinema in India or a slice of life cinema has many reasons, ruthless commercialization of the popular medium being the primary. As one of the largest film producing Nations, India has an enviable market for films. Mainstream cinema in its quest to capture the box-office often makes stuff that is anything but cinema and manifests a narrative which is anything but real thereby earning a bad reputation of being meaningless, incoherent fantasy. We have to understand at this juncture that it will not be wise to judge the realness of Indian cinema based on these popular mainstream films where a dozen or two extras burst into dancing, wearing bright clothes with tacky make-up in the middle of the city road, blocking traffic in the slightest of provocations of a potential love affair between the hero and heroine in the name of entertainment and song and dance relief, only to balance the sloppy melodrama that awaits every nook and corner of the film! 'Sometimes Indian cinema realistically portrays society. Sometimes it represents reality under the veneer of entertainment, violence and the like. Much of the mainstream cinema depicts society in this way. Spectators' psyche is exploited to gain commercial gains.'<sup>23</sup> However, eminent professor of sociology Patricia Uberoi (1998) identifies the role that Indian films play in tapping into the concerns of everyday life and also how they use strategies in resolving many conflicts therein. She also identifies the role of cinema as a social text that serves to highlight features of social life.<sup>24</sup> But in this context, we also have to keep in mind that Indian cinema is not a homogeneous commodity. Also, association of Indian cinema only with Bollywood (which many prefer to call Bollywoodization of Indian cinema) is a harmful practice thereby closing the room for regional cinema where the parallel film movement started and peaked its momentum in its heydays.

## **Conclusion**

*"Literature speaks the language of metaphor and cinema speaks the language of reality.*

-Bertolucci

In the end we might curiously ask then, what is the purpose of films? Is it limited to film aesthetics? Making *avant garde* films? Or is the depiction of social realism? Reality of the society entails questioning the 'system' itself...pinpointing that probably the system somewhere has gone haywire. Such questioning of the system is very essential in understanding the interface between cinema and society. Cinema influences society and vice versa. Having a thorough knowledge of the history of cinema and its concomitant theories and language ignites in us '*cinematic imagination*' which is so instrumental in understanding the true nature of cine-reality. So what entails cine-reality? Cinema and reality are dissociative words which are almost always forbidden together. So what kind of cinema is real for you and why so if at all? Aparna Sen once said in a talk:

*"I dislike cinema that is preachy & I don't think it ultimately has any effect on anyone. What actually does have an impact is if you can make an emotional connect. That is the only thing that finally stays with you".*<sup>25</sup>

This emotional connect takes place only when the audience can relate to their subjective experiences of the life-world to that of the social construction of reality via films. Cine-reality might have taken shape then. It may not be an exaggeration to say then, *if a picture is worth a thousand words, a film is worth trillions*, both literally and metaphorically.

## **Notes**

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# Sports and Sociological Theories: A Feminist Critique

*Saheli Chowdhury<sup>††</sup>*

*The influence of both Functionalism and Conflict Marxist perspectives on the discipline of sociology has been phenomenal since its inception. Both have provided valuable insights into the study of society and its various social institutions including sports. However, in spite of offering a theoretical structure to the study of sports and society, the interrelationship of sports and gender remained an uncharted territory within their theoretical paradigm. Feminist scholars argue that, though the theoretical orientations of the two perspectives run antagonistic to each other, both have agreed on one common ground i.e. excluding women's experience from their analysis of the institution of sports. Against this backdrop, this article aims to provide a feminist critique to the contributions of two major sociological traditions i.e. Functionalist and Conflict Marxist theory to sports sociology that emerged in the first half of the twentieth century. It also reflects Feminist contribution to the study of sports sociology, (giving rise to sports feminism) taking 'gender' as the focal point of analysis along with other categories like class, race, religion, sexuality and language which also shape the reality of lived experiences for individual.*

**Keywords:** *Sports sociology, Sports feminism*

## Introduction

It was Feminist social scientists who globally affirmed that mainstream sociology or more specifically sociological theories suffer from 'Androcentric biases', which was held guilty of being unaccountable for women's issues. They argue that sociological knowledge has indubitably overlooked the idea of incorporating women's experience and the organisation of gender as an important subject matter of inquiry. This intellectual crisis continues to exist in many sub-disciplines of sociology,

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one of them being Sociology of Sports. Sports sociology and or Sociology of sports, with its emergence in the North American and European societies in the first half of the twentieth century (in the 1920s), has primarily focused on sports as a cultural phenomena and social institution (Heinz Risse 1921, Gerald Kenyon, John Loy 1965, 1981, Luschen 1967, Stevenson, Nixon 1972, Harry Edwards 1973). Further theoretical developments within sports sociology discussed the interrelationship of various social variables and sports to depict and project how they influence each other. Intervention of feminists in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (in the 1970s) found that 'gender' has been the most ignored area of research within sociological theory of sports. Differences between women's and men's experience within sports, how women athletes encounter discrimination in the multifaceted dimensions of sports and related state of things compared to male athletes has hardly been addressed within the mainstream (malestream) sociological theory. Feminist research on sociology of sports has shown that gender differences do exist within the field of sports (Susan Birrell 1984, 1988, 1989, 1990, Jennifer Hargreaves 1986, 1994, Jim McKay, Michael A. Messner, Don Sabo 2000, Sheila Scraton, Anne Flintoff 2002, Eileen McDonagh, Laura Pappano 2008) and this subtle and often invisible sexism is further fuelled by twisted and partial media coverage and other factors like social class, norms, value system, ethnicity, religion, language, sexuality and above all patriarchal arrangement of things. The first half of this article will provide a feminist critique to the contributions of Functionalism and Conflict Marxist perspective to sports sociology and the second part of the article will illuminate on the feminist contributions to the study of sports sociology.

## **Sociological Theories on Sports**

### ***Functionalist Approach***

Functionalism or functionalist perspective is one of the mega theoretical traditions in sociology. It is based on the assumption that society is an organised system of interrelated parts which functions to maintain the equilibrium of the society<sup>1</sup>. Functionalist standpoint advocates the positive functions performed by social structures in producing and reproducing social order and cohesion<sup>2</sup>. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (i.e. in 1970's) many sport sociologists (Luschen 1967, Allardt 1970, Wohl 1970, Harry Edwards 1973, Gruneau 1975, Stevenson 1972, Nixon 1972) embraced the functionalist view of sports in society<sup>3</sup>. Functionalist-oriented sports sociologists considered 'sports' as a microcosm of social system, a valuable social institution, which contributes to social stability and is functional and

beneficial for individuals and society as whole. Early contributions to the functional analysis of sports can be credited to German sociologist Gunther Luschen (1967), who applied Parsonian perspective to his study and offered a functional role of sports in pattern maintenance and social integration<sup>4</sup>. Stevenson and Nixon (1972), also espoused the traditional functionalist framework to outlined five major social functions of sports<sup>5</sup> – first, *Socio-emotional functions* wherein sports contributes to the maintenance of socio-psychological stability by proving opportunities for conflict, tension management, camaraderie, and community bonding; second *Socialization*, where sports help to inculcate the cultural beliefs, values, mores; third *Social Integration*, where sports creates a platform for diverse individuals to interact with one another, fourth *Political functions*, where sports is used as a tool for serving (political) ideological purposes and fifth *Social mobility*, which provides individuals with prospect for upward mobility. Further works on sports and society has been produced by adopting the functionalist perspective, like Harry Edwards 'Sociology of Sports' (1967) in which the author describes sports (as a social institution) having primarily 'socialization and value maintenance function'. Heinila Tatatno's work 'A Model-Construction of sports as Culture' (1981) studied the importance of sport symbols and the interrelations between sports system and other systems.

Functionalism though provided the first generation sports sociologists a framework to analyse 'sports and society' as a subject matter of inquiry, they are subjected to criticism on several grounds. To begin with, the analysis on the functional nature of sports has been primarily based on male experience in sports. Functionalist approach to the study of sports and society represents sports as 'affirmative culture'<sup>6</sup> for males which maintains social order and cohesion. In other word sports has been seen as a medium for maintaining the status-quo (for men). Considering sports as a social institution, contributing positively to the society and reflecting its culture, norms and values covertly validates the existing unequal gender relation found in the society. Thus, as *Tim Delaney and Tim Madigan (2009)* states, functional analysis to sports is one-dimensional, underemphasising the presence of sexism, inequality, conflict, coercion and other contradictory aspects within the realm of sports. It celebrates male athleticism on one hand and approves images of passive unathletic female, as a prerequisite for proper functioning, integration, stability and order in the society.



***Marxist Approach (Conflict Theory)***

*"The conflict view is....founded upon the assumption that....any society....may provide extraordinarily good lives for some but this is usually only possible because the great majority are oppressed and degraded"*

*- Wes Sharrock (1977)*

Along with functionalism, conflict theory was also sociology's mega theoretical orientation although almost from polar opposite viewpoints. In sociology, conflict theory materialized through the works of Karl Marx (1818-1883)<sup>7</sup>. Its focal point of analysis is on the role of power which create inequality among members of society leading to unequal relationship, unequal distribution of scarce resources and hence domination and exploitation of disadvantaged by the advantaged group. Unlike functionalism which perceives society as an ordered system, conflict theory recognises the asymmetrical distribution of power and opportunities among the people and how such disparity is maintained, justified through force and the ideology of the powerful. In other word, conflict theorists are concerned with the role of power and domination found in all spheres of life<sup>8</sup>. They argue that power elite control and manipulate the rules, norms, values to their interest in every sphere of social system, which is also manifested in the institution of sports<sup>9</sup>. Some conflict theorists enthused by the Marxist Tradition produced significant number of works on sociology of sports since 1970s giving rise to Marxist sociology of sports. Though Marxist sports sociology is not a unified theory, what they have in common is their critical approach to the nature of capitalist sports<sup>10</sup>. This group of scholars (Hoch 1972, Vinnai 1973, Gruneau 1975, Brohm 1978, Rigauer 1981, Beamish 1982; 1988) studied modern sports as a reflection of capitalism and class relations and expression of class power and social control<sup>11</sup>. It also stressed how modern sports are reservoirs of dominant ideology, a weapon of the power elite to keep the mass under control. *Paul Hoch (1972)*, in his famous work 'Rip off the Big Game: The Exploitation of Sports by the Power Elite' used the Marxist standpoint to argue that religion (which Marx considered as opium of the masses) has been replaced by sports as the 'opiate of the masses'<sup>12</sup>. Stating how 'sports' is used by the powerful to divert common people from the reality, and distance them from the matter of the state, i.e. 'escape from the mundane'<sup>13</sup>. Another advocate of Marxist perspective on sports, *R.S. Gruneau (1975: 23-25)* discusses in 'Modernization or Hegemony: Two views on Sports and Social Development' the relationship between capitalism and sports and outlined four important effect of capitalism on sports – *first*, capitalist production process has reduced sports into a commodity on a global scale by commercialisation<sup>14</sup>. It (sports) is no longer recreational; *second*, sports is

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used as a vehicle for political socialization (learning to accept the dominant ideas, values, norms) thus, serving capitalist interest by reproducing unequal class relations that already exist; *third*, Sports reflect the 'bourgeois ideology' fostering false consciousness for the lower (suppressed) class; *fourth*, Sports generate and intensify alienation by reducing athletic performances into objects of exchange value and commodity relations<sup>15</sup>. Marxist analysis of sports has underscored how capitalism utilises sports as a tool of exploiting the already oppressed class.

Although, highly relevant and significant, Marxist Sociology of sports has been challenged on a number of grounds. Like, as *Jennifer Hargreaves* in 1994 argues that the sphere of gender relation is barely noticeable in Marxist analysis of sports. Its focus on class difference, the relation between sports and capitalism, fails to capture the unequal positioning of men and women as well as the differences in power relation between men and women. Further, Marxist approach to sports has overlooked the *dual oppression* of both capitalist and patriarchal ideology on women, creating a double barrier for women (in general) to participate in sport and women athletes (in particular) within sports.

Reviewing two of the most significant Sociological theories on Sports, it has been clear that none of the two theories have taken women's experience as a matter of enquiry nor have they recognized the complexities of gender relations reproduced through sports. Both the theories have justified their position on the nature and functions of sports, with a one dimensional approach, i.e. either functional nature of sports or capitalist nature of sports, without taking other social variables like gender, class, race, religion, and sexuality into account for investigation. Thus it becomes quite obvious that these two theoretical approaches have provided an Androcentric conception of sports sociology which remained dominant till the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was only during the 1980's that the feminist approach emerged which provided an alternative direction to the study of sports sociology, exposing the hidden truth and reality.

## **Feminist Contribution to Sociology of Sports**

### ***The Emergence of 'Gender' and 'Sports feminism'***

Feminist theory emerged as a critique of the limitations of the mainstream sociological theories that excluded women and women's issue as a serious subject matter of research. Like other sociological theories, feminist theory offers an explanation on way of life, our actions, behaviour, within a

particular cultural context. But what distinguishes feminist perspective from other theories is its emphasis on 'gender' as a category of investigation. All feminist theories privilege 'gender' as the focal point of analysis, because they are rooted on the belief that human experiences are gendered<sup>16</sup>. Feminist scholars found 'sports' as a logical site for analysis of relationship of gender, which led to the development of 'Sports Feminism' (Hargreaves, 1994:25) in North America in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the central tenet of sports feminism is (1) To uncover the gendered nature of sports, (2) To disclose how sports is used as a medium through which patriarchal ideology is reproduced, (3) To expose ways in which men's power over women's power in sports has been institutionalised (4) To debunk myths associated with women's participation in sports, and (5) How the synthesis of multiple identities of women i.e. gender, race, class, sexuality, religion lead to further discrimination within the realm of sports.

Historically and cross-culturally women have been considered incompatible with sporting activities and have been debarred from equitable access to sports. Pioneering studies approximately since 1980s on gendered nature of sports (Dorothy Kidd 1983, Susan Birrell 1984, 1988, Theberg 1985, Jennifer Hargreaves 1984, 1994, Jim McKay, Michael A. Messner, Don Sabo 2000, Sheila Scruton, Anne Flintoff 2002, Eileen McDonagh, Laura Pappano 2008) has often put forward the position that women/girls face countless barriers to participating in sports coupled with discrimination and stereotyping within sports itself. Scruton and Flintoff in their work *Gender and Sports: A Reader* (2002), Jean Williams in *A Game for Rough Girls?* (2003) have also argued that sports is construed to be traditionally associated with masculinity as girls/women are considered unsuitable to engage in sports because they have physiological differences with men. Tess Kay and Ruth Jeanes (2008:131) in their article 'Women, Sport and Gender Inequity' underscored three rationales that have been given for opposing women's participation in sports –

- 1) *The medical rationale*- that women are physiologically unsuited to sporting activity.
- 2) *The aesthetic rationale*- that women engaging in sports are an unattractive spectacle.
- 3) *The social rationale*- that the activities and behaviour associated with sports is contrary to women's 'real femininity'.

The authors argue that these rationales have been taken as yardstick to regard women as somewhat handicapped for sports.

The growing challenge posed by the feminist movement against the Androcentric nature of sports is not unified. Various strands of feminist

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theory have contributed distinctively to the study of sports sociology, namely *Liberal, Radical and Marxist*. Further adoption of *Postmodern, Cultural studies* approach and *Intersectional* approach has also produced valuable discourses on the nature, function and characteristics of sports in society. This section of the article will briefly examine the contributions of feminist theory to sports research.

### ***Liberal Feminist Approach***

The starting point for reviewing the various theoretical frameworks deployed in feminist research is liberal feminism. Liberal feminism in general is based on the belief that women are disadvantaged because they do not have equal access to resources and opportunities compared to men. Liberal feminist approach to the study of sports has always challenged historically acquired inequalities in sports between men and women. They reject biologically determined explanation for women's lack of participation in sports and consider sports as a gendered institution with inadequate provision and limited opportunities for women to partake. They advocate that if women are given the opportunity they can participate in full range of sports that men enjoy<sup>17</sup>. For example Title IX in U.S.A (1972) was implemented to equalize opportunities between sexes as part of 'sports for all campaign'. Thus, liberal ideology in sports concerns itself with providing 'equal opportunity' to women in comparison to men through legal and social reforms. Though relevant, however, there are contradictory implications in liberal feminist position. Like, as Jenifer Hargreaves states, the conception of equal opportunity symbolized 'catching up the men', that is it takes for granted the gendered nature of sports, where women's right has to be fitted in. Theoretically, liberal feminism fails to examine the complexities of gender relation of power in sports. Further it doesn't question the 'patriarchal ideology' for creating a barrier for women and at the same time it fails to capture discrimination within the field of sports.

### ***Radical Feminist Approach***

In the chronological order next comes the Radical feminist approach, which asserts that 'patriarchy'- an elaborate system of male domination<sup>18</sup> is the root cause of women's oppression. Unlike liberal approach, radical philosophy alleges that the ability of men to dominate women is the most basic form of oppression based on physical and psychological differences between sexes<sup>19</sup>. 'Family' is considered as an important nurturer of patriarchy (through socialization) along with other institutions like school and marriage. Radical feminism challenges the positive correlation between

sports and masculinity, and argues for separate sports for men and women. In contrast to liberal feminists, radical feminists tend to be apprehensive of governmental intervention, perceiving that the state itself reflect and uphold men's interests. They take a pro-women and anti-male stance blaming patriarchal ideology for excluding women from and within sports. It is worth mentioning that radical feminist perspective was the first to address and challenge the patriarchal ideology and its negative impact leading to subjugation of women in all spheres of social life, including sports. However, some of their propositions have incited arguments among the feminist group. Such as, the claim for separate sports for men and women covertly sanctions the biological distinction between the two sexes. Further it also accepts male superiority and domination over females in sports<sup>20</sup>. Secondly, radical perspective focuses only on patriarchy as a rationale for oppression of (women) and women athletes, overlooking other social status of (women) athletes like class, race, religion, sexuality nationality which along with patriarchal ideology leads to their discrimination and exclusion within sports<sup>21</sup>.

### ***Marxist Feminist Approach***

The third feminist theoretical tradition that derives its ideas and identity from Marxism is Marxist feminism. Marxist feminists attempt to adopt Marxist theory to analyse and provide adequate explanation for exploitation of women in capitalist societies. They perceive that gender inequality is derived from capitalism, class and economic exploitation<sup>22</sup>. It claims that women's subordination in the social system, including private and public sphere (family and work place) serves the underlying interest of the capitalism, first a) by serving family (husband and children) as an *unpaid* domestic labour (lack of financial independence) and b) by serving capitalists as a *low paid* labour (restricted to the labour class, low social status). In sphere of sports, Marxist feminists argue that sexism in sports is a component of 'bourgeois ideology' which underpins sexual division of labour, necessary for the survival of capitalism. Thus women have less financial capacity to engage in sports for being low earners and having less time due to domestic/ familial duties, which is considered solely as 'women's responsibility'. However, much like radical approach, Marxist feminism in their analysis of gender and sports tend to overlook the role of other social variables, such as class and gender. Class differences between women have also been seen to affect their access to sports. For example it is argued that working class women find it more difficult to engage in sports than middle-class women. Thus such a claim needs to be addressed to

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expose ways in which gender inequalities is accentuated by class inequalities in sports.

### ***Feminist Cultural Study Approach***

Susan Birrell (2000) claim that cultural studies (which initially developed in England) is based on the assumption that power is distributed inequitably throughout society, often along lines of gender, class, race, which is maintained not by coercion but through subtle forms of ideological dominance. Feminist Cultural studies in sports emerged in the 1980's with a critical approach towards the institution of sports arguing how power and gender relations are reproduced by, resisted in, and transformed through sports. In 1988, *Susan Birrell* identified four themes central to the critical feminist cultural studies project:

1. The production of an ideology of masculinity and male power through sports.
2. The media practices through which dominant notions of women are reproduced.
3. Physicality, sexuality and body as sites for defining gender relations.
4. The resistance of women to dominant sports practice.

Sport is defined as institutional, structured and sanctioned competitive activity beyond the realm of play that involve physical exertion and the use of relatively complex athletic skills. Victorian version of sports celebrated masculinity or male power through competitive attitude, physical toughness and dominance<sup>23</sup>. Prior to 1870 sports for women/girls mainly existed in the form of play which was recreational and informal compared to sports for men/boys which were sports specific in nature<sup>24</sup>. Further women were considered physically weak for developing athletic skills, and participation in sports would put their "femininity" at risk and threaten the social order. Thus, sports was used a medium to demonstrate patriarchal ideology by accentuating masculinity through physical prowess defaming femininity by constructing a model of female frailty. The resistance of women to dominant sports practice is therefore justified and maintained not through force, but through ideological supremacy.

Research consistently revealed that media (both print and visual) has been a purveyor of dominant ideology in society (Hasbrook 1988, Duncan 1990, Creedon 1994, Davis 1997). Pamela J. Creedon (1994) in her work 'Gender, Media and Sports' claim that media unequally report women sports news and men sports news, with the former being almost invisible and the latter dominant. Ignoring the achievements of sportswomen at

various national and international levels, media portrays sexualized images of women athletes in televisions and magazines, exposing the so called feminine side of women athletes. Media fails to recognize and appreciate the athletic skills of Women athletes by comparing their ability with male athletes, like for example acknowledging Saina Nehwal and Pusarla V. Sindhu as Sachin Tendulkar and Saurav Ganguly of Badminton. Furthermore, Women athletes are seldom hired for lucrative product endorsements that their male counterparts receive has also been the most heated debate among feminists.

### ***Post-modern Feminist Approach***

Postmodernism concerns itself with the interrelationship between language, knowledge, reason, power and identity. Postmodern feminism emerged during the third-wave feminist movement in the 1990s as a critique of 'knowledge' being valid, scientific, rational that claims to know the truth, shaping the identity, experience and reality for women. Inspired from the works of Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, postmodern feminists consider knowledge as a product of 'power' that is transmitted through language – as the primary means of shaping the consciousness. Similarly, they argue that 'gender' is a product of dominant knowledge that is constructed through language, thus creating the binary division between men and women. They claim that the dichotomous division between male / female or men/ women attaches identity, according to which each of these categories perform their roles (either as men or women) in the society. Moreover, such construction of identities and performing according to those constructed identities is manifested in most of the social institutions, including sports. Sports has always been perceived as a male preserve, where men/boys were/are only encouraged to take part in sporting activities that would enhance their manliness. Women on the other hand were/are discouraged to engage in any athletic activities, for it would endanger their reproductive health, and consequently their 'femininity'. It is here that postmodern feminists reject the 'rational claim' or the 'scientific knowledge' regarding women's and men's participation in sports, arguing that the claim to truth is not neutral but gender-specific reflections of power. For example it is considered natural for a woman/girl not to participate in any sporting activities and stay at home and accentuate ones feminine characteristics, whereas for men/boys it is expected to engage in sports that would heighten their masculinity. Hence, a woman not engaging in sports is conceived as feminine, and men engaging in sports are considered as masculine. Thus, postmodern feminists criticises 'knowledge' for creating an illusion of truth that restricts women from engaging in sports and reaping the benefits of such activity.

### ***Intersectional Approach***

For a long period of time Feminist social scientists have criticised 'Sports' and 'Sports Studies' for not being gynocentric (Theberg 1987, Birrell and Cole 1994, Hargreaves 1994, Hall 1996) and have tried to dispel the myth about women being athletically inferior to men- taking 'Gender' as the focal point of analysis and remonstrance (Scruton 2002, Scruton and Flintoff 2002, Huggins and Randell 2007, McDonagh and Pappano 2008). However in the last decade Feminist scholars (especially Black Feminists) in North America and Europe have broadened their theoretical outlook, by decentring 'gender' and incorporating multiple social identities of Race, Class, Age, Sexuality, Religion, Disability, Nationality and even Language as intersecting axes of oppression. What we today know as the Intersectional approach or intersectionality- a term coined by legal feminist scholar Kimberle W. Crenshaw (1989) promises to expose the different dimensions of inequality- from, the multiple oppression of women to multiple positioning of all human beings in the society<sup>25</sup>. The root of Intersectionality lies in Black Women's Right movement in U.S. during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which criticised white-middle class feminism and raised voice against racism and sexism. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) argues for the need to understand interlocking axes of oppression because as Kathy Davis, (2008) summed up "Intersectionality addresses the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women". Thus, Feminist negotiation with Intersectionality has particularly challenged the conception of 'women as a homogeneous group' and that 'all women are equally oppressed'. Moreover, feminist espousal of intersectional approach has also been implemented to analyse how the interaction of gender, social class, race, religion, language and sexuality contribute to unequal participation, marginalization and trivialisation of women/girls (athletes) in sports. Very few studies, (Messner 1992, Birrell and Theberge 1994, Cahn 1995) have adopted the intersectional approach to understand how women athletes belonging to different strata of society, belonging to different religion, having separate sexual orientation experience multiple form of oppression in sports. For example Legal scholar Rhonda Reaves notes that African American women often experience discrimination because of their gender and race. Consequently they are vulnerable to the harm of sexual harassment (both verbal and physical) in sports context where they are coached by white males<sup>26</sup>. Class difference among women also limits ones access to opportunities. For example, women belonging to the affluent



section of the society has enough resource to engage in any sports, like equestrian sports (sports that involve horse, like Polo, horse race), whereas working class women can never afford the expense of such sport. Further, sexual orientation of women athletes in sports is another major area which has gained attention of sports feminists. Research (Hargreaves 1994, Huggins, Randell 2007) state that women athletes who tread in male territory of sports like boxing, wrestling, weight lifting is often labelled as lesbian or tomboy, which leads to the stereotypical belief that there exists a positive correlation between athletic women and homosexuality. It has been observed that the dominant heterosexual ideology within sports suppress homosexuality, as a result lesbian athletes hide their sexuality in order to avoid harassments as well as to protect their sporting career. In other words they fear to become victims of homophobia (a fear, intolerance and hatred of gay men and lesbians)<sup>27</sup>. On the other side, as Dorothy Kidd (1983) in her work 'Getting Physical: Compulsory Heterosexuality in Sports' observed that sportswomen who identify themselves as lesbians are denied of opportunities as coaches or administrators, thus, they become victims of homophobia. Another variable that has been considered important for intersectional analysis of women athletes in sports is language. Language has been an important medium of expressing oneself. Research reveals that language plays an important role in constructing gender differences in this 'hyper-masculinised world of' sports. Using derogatory sexual and racist remarks to describe women athletes reinforces notions of inferiority and differences concerning their ability (Cain 2000; Huggins, Randell 2007). Instances like American commentator Don Imus's infamous comment in April 2007 about the players of Rutgers University Women's Basketball team as '*nappy-headed ho's*' - the term directly attacked their race as well as affirming their sexual promiscuity (Huggins, Randell 2007). It has been argued that religious ideologies in some countries also influence women's participation in sports. For example, Muslim women in Muslim countries like Iran, Iraq, Brunei, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Bangladesh appear to be the most restricted in their public display of athletic skills.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, what is worth mentioning in feminist approach is that it challenges the traditional sociological theory which claimed superiority over the discipline by representing the knowledge of the privileged section, i.e. men. What Dorothy Smith states 'eliminating the boundaries between who can be a knower and what can be known'. Taking gender as a category of analysis feminist research has placed women's lives and other marginalized group at the centre of social inquiry<sup>28</sup>. Similarly, feminist

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contribution to the study of sports sociology has taken experiences of women athletes within the realm of sports as a source of knowledge and brought to the fore that sports is a gendered institution, where gender relation is produced and reproduced. It critiques both the institution of sports and the Androcentric biases in sports. Various strands of feminist theory provided multidimensional approach, which unearthed the multifaceted discrimination of women athletes within the sphere of sports. Further feminist adoption of cultural study and intersectional approach has also broadened the research area by focusing not alone on gender, but on other dimensions like class, race, language, sexuality which leads to 'multiple oppression' of women athletes. Messner and Sabo (1990) acknowledged the contribution of feminist approach to the study of sports by stating:

*"Feminist analysis uncovered a hidden history of female athleticism, examined sex differences in patterns of athletic socialization, and demonstrated how the dominant institutional forms of sports have naturalized men's power and privilege over women."*

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# Understanding female criminality : A theoretical exploration of agency in women's crime

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*In comparison with relatively significant documentation on different aspects of male crime and delinquency, the amount of work carried out in the area of women and crime is extremely inadequate in India. Deviant actions by women, particularly violent offenses are seen as signs of abnormality. Early criminological discourses in the west have constantly attempted to pathologize deviance in women, constructing 'crime' as an act of aggression by men that reinforce stereotypes of masculinity. Contemporary trends in feminist research have emphasized the links between victimization and offending in the life cycle of the female offenders, thereby ignoring the role of women's agency in crime. The purpose of the present study is to argue for a theoretical framework that accounts for experience and agency of women offenders, advocating punishment for violation of collective rights, without demonizing representations of women who commit crime.*

**Key words :** agency; subjectivity; rational choice; victimization.

## Introduction

The issue of female criminality has assumed a complex nature in contemporary Indian society. Although a numerical minority, women constitute a significant proportion of the offending population in India. However, there is an acute paucity of scholarship in the area of female criminality in Indian sociology. In comparison with relatively significant documentation on different aspects of male crime and delinquency, the amount of work carried out in the area of women and crime is extremely inadequate in India. It has been argued that the number of female offenders

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is so small that there is no subject matter to justify research. As per the NCRB report of 2011, there are 1382 functioning jails in India having a total capacity to house 3,32,782 prisoners. As of the same date, there were 3,72,926 inmates in jails across the country. Males at 3,56,902 make up 95.7% of prisoners while females at 16,024 represent 4.3%. Deviance of women is therefore a non-problem to both social scientists and society in general.

Deviant actions by women, particularly violent offenses are seen as signs of abnormality. Early criminological discourses in the west have constantly attempted to pathologize deviance in women. This is mainly because 'crime' is constructed as an act of masculine aggression that naturalizes men's deviant behavior. By contrast, femininity is typified in terms of passivity, docility and lack of agency. Thus the deviant woman emerges as an aberrant category, displaying signs of abnormality and difference (Braidotti, 1997).

Contemporary trends in feminist research have mainly focused on the links between victimization and offending in the cycle of the female offenders, thereby ignoring the role of women's agency in crime. Crime by a woman is explained as her response to economic dependence, poverty, sexual and physical abuse, which denies her a sense of purpose as a rational agent of crime. Thus, there is a tendency within traditional criminological as well as feminist discourses to adopt a binary approach and essentialise female criminality in portraying them as either pathological or as victims of earlier crime. The purpose of the present study is to argue for a theoretical framework that accounts for experience and agency of women offenders, advocating punishment for violation of collective rights, without demonizing representations of women who commit crime. In doing so, I have attempted to chart the trajectory of theoretical development from early pre feminist criminological literature to contemporary feminist developments in the west. Efforts have also been made to understand historical conceptions of female crime in colonial India that had strong underpinnings of women's rational choice in crime, as opposed to the largely descriptive socio-economic accounts of female offenders in contemporary Indian literature that focused mainly on their victim status in interpreting their crimes.

### **Early theoretical perspectives of female criminality**

In the early days of criminology, theoretical debate was dictated from a predominantly biological perspective. Attempts were made to establish a

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link between the physiological characteristics of an individual and their propensity to commit crime. The most significant early studies of female criminality are the works of Lombroso and Ferrero (1895). In *The Female Offender* (1895), Lombroso and Ferrero explained the concept of atavism that constructed the female criminal as an abnormal type. Following the earlier line of argument Thomas (1923) explained that the source of female criminality, which is mainly sexual, lay in the breakdown of the traditional restraints on women. Pollack's (1950) analysis focused on the 'masked' character of female criminality, citing hysteria and lunacy as the real reasons for crime proneness in women.

Tracing the continuance of sexist assumptions from Lombroso (1895) to Pollak (1950) and beyond, Smart (1976) examined how assumptions of abnormality of female offenders came to dominate both theory and criminal justice policy. Thus, women were ignored, marginalized or distorted, both in their deviancy and in their conformity. Eileen Leonard summarized mainstream criminological theory by stating : "Theories that are frequently hailed as explanations of human behaviour are, in fact, discussions of male behaviour and male criminality..... We cannot simply apply these theories to women, nor can we modify them with a brief addition or subtraction here and there" (1982 : 181).

### **Development of feminist criminology in the west**

Theoretical explanations for the growing incidence of female crime in the late 1960's and early 1970's was put forward by Adler and Simon who argued that women offenders were changing their patterns of offending to more 'masculine' styles, becoming more aggressive and violent. This change was attributed to the growth of modern women's movement, popularly known as the 'liberation hypotheses' (Adler, 1975). However, this account of female crime was considered unsatisfactory because empirical findings showed that women who offended were not empowered as a result of women's movement.

Contemporary research in the area of female crime has indicated gender as a powerful variable that shapes the victimization to offending patterns in women. Research on women's pathways into crime, for instance, recognized that gender has a significant role in shaping criminality. Women and men enter the criminal justice system via different pathways. Among women, the most common pathways to crime that produce and sustain female criminality, are histories of physical and sexual abuse, mental illness tied to early life experiences, substance abuse and addiction, economic and



social marginality, homelessness and dysfunctional relationships (Steffensmeier & Allan, 1995; Dobash et al. 1992; Widom 1999). Richie (1996) used the concept of gender entrapment to explain how some women are forced into crime by their culturally expected gender role, the violence in their intimate relationships and their social positions in the larger society. Such women may be coerced to commit crimes, such as selling drugs, robbing or prostituting, by their abusive partners. Arnold (1990) has argued that women involved in crime are structurally dislocated from three primary institutions of socialization : 1) the family, 2) the educational system, 3) the occupational system. Patriarchal power relations manifest in the norms of marriage and family and place of work, create gendered environs, thereby pushing women into crime, through victimization, role entrapment, economic marginality and survival needs.

### **Construction of female criminality in India**

The notion of crime underwent drastic changes during the colonial period in India with the British administrative set up emphasizing the establishment of a uniform civil code and regularization of justice through law courts that redefined many colonial social practices and customs as 'crime'. This was an era of new types of crimes, some of which were driven by poverty and underdevelopment and some of which were driven by colonial ruler's desire to impose Western morality upon the subjects. In keeping with the standards of European morality, women's actions revealed their resistance to medieval patriarchy as well as intrusion of an alien state power (Anagol, 2002).

Historical accounts of diverse types of women criminals in 19<sup>th</sup> century Calcutta, for instance, shatter many stereotypical notions of crime's interrelation with femininity. In the police records of Calcutta for instance, prostitutes constituted the bulk of female criminals, followed by women who worked as accomplices of their male counterparts in manufacturing and circulating counterfeit coins. (Banerjee, 2008). The need for protection from police repression and unwanted men let the prostitutes to depend on local gangsters and professional criminals. Thus, these women negotiated the two spheres of violence in their day to day lives – one dominated by the colonial administration and the other by the indigenous underworld. The prostitutes were blamed for the spread of venereal diseases among the British troops and the Contagious Diseases Act criminalized the profession of prostitution forever (2008:38).

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In 1864, the Calcutta High Court passed a judgment on ten year old Aimona who was accused of killing her nineteen year old husband with a chopper while he was asleep. The provocation for the murder was thought to be the beating that she got from her husband for some of act of mischief. (*Weekly Reporter*, Vol. 1, 1864, cited in Banerjee, 2008). Mention may be made of Sushila, the mistress of a well-known barrister of Calcutta, who later became an active member of the Calcutta underworld; or Trailokya, a prostitute and a serial killer, who committed heinous murders in cold blood in her struggle for survival (2008:30). Women of colonial Calcutta were also associated with the hotel business in Calcutta. Priyanath Mukhopadhyay in his '*Darogar Daptar*' wrote that around 1710, the earliest among such entrepreneurs was Demingo Ash, who ran a hotel and a liquor selling shop.

Padma Anagol argued in her essay "The Emergence of the Female Criminal in India : Infanticide and Survival Under the Raj" (2002) that female crime was often the result of a limited range of strategies for survival, available to subordinated groups in oppressive situations. One of the most important variants of the female criminal was the infanticidal woman, who emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century after the passing of the Infanticide Act in 1870. This act bore link to the Hindu norm of prohibition of widow remarriage and generated a compelling body of negative knowledge about Indian female sexuality. The woman who committed infanticide was perceived as lustful, depraved, perverted and wholly lacking in maternal instincts. There was complete silence on the role of the men who were equally involved in the reproductive process. Reiterating their administrative stance, Justice West wrote : ".....the accused must have known when she indulged her lust, or yielded to the indulgence of the lust of someone else, that these dire consequences might follow; and what was the value, either morally, or from any point of view of sensibility which was sufficient to make a woman destroy her own offspring, but which was not sufficient to guard her against the indulgence of her lust" (cited in Anagol, 2002:79). Sovarna cherukuri (2008) has argued that in order to gain a critical insight into the phenomenon of female crime there is a need to adopt an intersectional perspective that focused on cross-cutting factors such as caste, class and gender. In a study conducted by Smriti Bhosle (2009) with 90 under trial female prisoners in Mumbai, it was seen that the women were young, married, illiterate and generally belonged to low socio-economic status groups in their region. Young age, combined with their dependent status very often created conditions leading to maladjustment, stress and conflict in the family.

Apart from caste and class, it is also relevant to understand the dynamics of power relations that women negotiate within the family structure, that very often lead them from one form of control to another. Significantly, both the family and the prison constitute institutionalized domains of patriarchal power that women, criminal or otherwise, experience. Ahuja (1969) in his study of female offenders in India has considered maladjustment in the family as the most important cause behind female crime. This is also because the relational concerns of women are greater than men, as women are socialized into the roles of care-givers from the beginning. Several other studies conducted by M. Bilmoria Rani (1977) and Shankardas (2000) also point out to the role of family, marriage, lack of education and poor economic status as factors responsible for crimes committed by women.

### **Breaking the Essentialist Myth : Are Women Agentic in Committing Crime ?**

With reference to the above theoretical overview in the area of female criminality in India and the West, it is easy to notice the essentialist framework underpinned by fixed dualisms of masculine and feminine that define crime. Essentialism in this sense includes a belief in fixed and natural set of characteristics that are prior to existence. Such an essentialist framework tends to homogenize the realities of female offenders, interpreting it as one. So, while for men, 'crime' is viewed as 'normal' legal contravention of rules to be dealt with within the legal / punishment paradigm, for women, crime is symptomatic of pathology, demanding treatment.

Feminist criminology's refusal to pathologize women's deviance has led to the inevitable reconstruction of women's experiences into discourses acceptable to the law courts and penal institutions. In the process the label of an aberrant woman is replaced by the label of the helpless victim with low self esteem, helping those secure lenient sentences in the court. Understanding victimization of women, specifically male violence, is no doubt necessary to break away from the paternalistic treatment / welfare model for women offenders towards a new paradigm of restorative justice. However, this theoretical framework that places women in a position of passivity and submission in interpreting their 'acting out' as a response to earlier crime simply precludes the possibility of constructing women as agentic, purposeful and motivated actors in the commission of crime.

Agency in this sense can be understood as exercise of rational choice bought about by a clear sense of purpose in committing the crime. Rational

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choice as a paradigm has long since been dominant in economics, but in the recent decades it has become widely used in other disciplines. Rational choice theory is based on assumptions of self-interested and motivated actors as exercising rational choice in order to maximize their goals. The central element of rational choice theory is the calculation of cost benefit analysis in carrying out both deviant and conforming behavior. The starting point of rational choice perspective in crime is that crime is chosen for its benefits. Rational choice theory asserts that if the benefits of crime are high and the costs low, crime will occur. However, if the benefits of crime are lower than the costs, crime will not occur (Serdar Kenan Gul, 2009). Piquero and Hickman (2002) argued that while traditional criminology viewed criminals driven by their conditioning and environment, more recent economics based theories portray them as rational decision makers who based their decisions to commit crimes on an analysis of the risk of the venture compared with expected profits. By this logic women who 'act out' can also be viewed as rational decision makers in the commission of crime.

### **Conclusion**

In constructing women offenders as agentic actors, therefore, one needs to understand the lived experiences of women placed at particular intersections of patriarchy and class. In theoretical terms, it becomes necessary to recognize the fact that women offenders do not form a uniform group, a homogenous category. Thus any attempt to define agency of women offenders must also take into account their different social locations in terms of class, age, sexuality, ethnicity and religion, as well as the different modes of resistance they employ to negotiate class and / or patriarchy both within and outside the criminal justice system. Thus, there is a need to create a new paradigm for understanding female criminality by delinking the essential paradox between femininity and crime. Seen from this perspective, the prostitute, the drug peddling woman or the woman who murders her battering spouse can be understood as agentic actors in carrying out specific acts of resistance specific to her experience and social location. By recognizing a woman's capacity to exercise free will in executing independent decisions, criminological discourses must thereby recognize her right to be full human.

### **Notes**

- i) Atavism refers to a situation where an individual member of a species could be identified as a throwback to an earlier genetic period. The

concept of atavism established the foundations of biologically deterministic theories of crime.

- ii) The issue as first raised by Adler and Simon who argued that female crime rates had been rising more rapidly in the late 1960's and early 1970's. They also asserted that women offenders were changing their patterns of offending to more 'masculine' styles, becoming more aggressive and violent. This change was attributed to the growth of modern women's movement, popularly known as the 'liberation hypotheses'.
- iii) The 'pathways perspective' incorporates a whole-life perspective in the study of crime causation. The pathways research has used extensive interviews with women to uncover the life events that place women and girls at risk of criminal offending. See *Gender Responsive Strategies : Research, Practice, and Guiding Principles for Women Offenders*; by Barbara Bloom, Barbara Owen and Stephanie Covington; published the National Institute of Corrections; July 2003.

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**The Department mourns the death of**

**Professor Bela Dutt Gupta**

**Professor Deb Kumar Banerjee**

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PUBLISHED BY THE REGISTRAR, UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA,  
87/1, COLLEGE STREET, KOLKATA - 700 073

AND

PRINTED BY DR. APARESH DAS,  
SUPERINTENDENT, CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY PRESS,  
48, HAZRA ROAD, KOLKATA - 700 019.

Price Rs. 50/-